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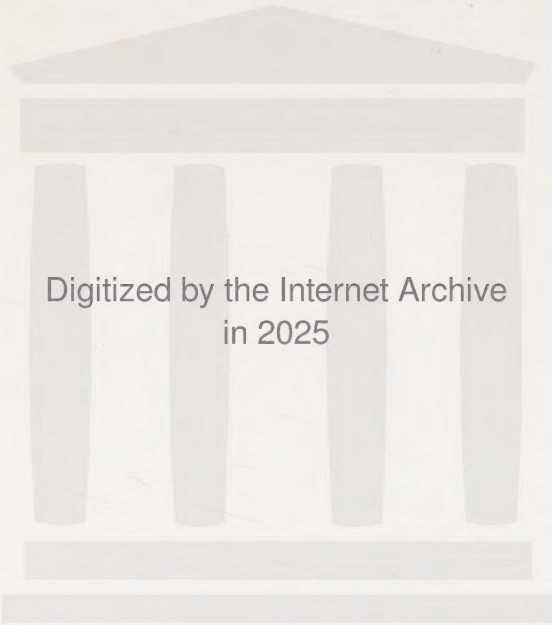

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TWO SERIES OF

Lenten Sermons

ON

I. SIN AND ITS REMEDIES

II. THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

BY

REV. FRANCIS X. McGOWAN, O. S. A.

"Lent is the spring-time for sanctified resolutions."
—Capsscups, Holy Course.

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PREFACE.

These two series of Lenten Sermons have been mainly published with the view of assisting the Reverend Clergy in the weekly services of Lent now so general in our parochial churches.

The first series deals with Mortal Sin and its remedies; the second, with the Seven Deadly Sins and their cure.

Instruction is always the chief purpose of the Catholic preacher, and it is especially blessed with abundant fruit during the holy season of Lent. The good work of Penance done in this penitential time and the worthy dispositions evinced in its doing are a great incentive to priests to lay practical and thought-provoking suggestions before the people.

These sermons are respectfully offered as a means conducive to this end.

F. X. McGowan, O. S. A.

Cambridge, N. Y.

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TWO SERIES OF LENTEN SERMONS

SERMON I.

MORTAL SIN.

Know then, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the Lord thy God. (Jer. ii. 19.)

It is an undoubted fact, as evident as the noon-day's sun, that mortal sin is the cause of our spiritual ruin and the chief obstacle to our eternal salvation. The Catholic Church counts sixteen millions of martyrs on her holy beadroll, and how many others there are, we do not know. A very large proportion of these witnesses of the faith were noble, learned, judicious, and prudent, and yet they all sacrificed their fortunes, prospects, relations, and friends; they endured the iron and fire of persecution – all that the fury of executioners could invent to avoid the crime of committing a single mortal sin. Besides this glorious host, numberless others quitted the world and withdrew into desert places or monasteries, abandoning homes, honors, riches, and pleasures, to escape the danger of doing sin.

Were all these men, these confessors of the faith, these Christian virgins, deluded extremists or foolish fanatics? Assuredly no. The whole world of all ages has admired their saintly motives and lives, and the universal Church honors their memory,

They acted wisely, then, in sacrificing all rather than sin grievously. Sin is a supreme evil; it surpasses all the woes that man could suffer on earth. It is an outrage on God. *By transgression of the law, thou dishonorest God.* (Rom. ii. 23.) And to dishonor God is an evil greater than all the misfortunes that creatures could suffer here below. We are the foolish ones, not the holy solitaries, who will not understand the fear that led them away from a sinful world. Let us, however, strive to be convinced, *know and see*, that we may imitate the wisdom of the saints and withdraw from the multitude of the reprobate who sacrifice God to their appetites and passions.

A mortal sin is a grievous transgression of God's law, a serious violation of His commandments. Blasphemy, culpable neglect of His worship by attending Mass, a gross violation of the sanctity of the Lord's day, great hatred, murder, thoughts, desires, and acts against purity of soul—all these are grievous, mortal sins. Let us look attentively at all that is odious in the injury which we inflict on God by committing mortal sin, so that we may excite in ourselves a salutary horror for past disobedience and a determination to abandon sin forever.

Mortal sin is 1st, an audacious revolt against the majesty of God, and 2d, a contempt for His authority and an ingratitude for His favors.

1. An aged man, whose days are numbered, thus addresses his wayward son, who is beholden to him for life and the goods of life: "My son, hearken to your father. You owe his gray hairs

respect; he has lived solely for you, and has commanded you to do nothing except for your own happiness. Do not crush the old age of your parent, do not trample under foot his authority the most sacred authority on earth. Listen to him; give up your bad company."—"I will do nothing of the kind," the rebellious son answers and he leaves his sorrowing parent, to spend the paternal inheritance in crime and debauchery, while the aged sire pines away with deathful grief. This is a shameful revolt against a father's authority, and all honest souls are indignant at it.

A king, as good as he is powerful, sits on his throne surrounded by his court. One of his favorites, whom he lifted from poverty and degradation, and has admitted to his palace, stalks forth through the royal retinue, and in the presence of all the courtiers, seizes the king's crown and the sceptre which he holds. He breaks the sceptre into pieces and throws them on the floor, and taking the royal crown, he places it on the head of the lowest variet there. Everybody cries out against such outrageous boldness. Yet we do not rise up against the audacity of the sinner. Ah! we do not know God.

God is the good Father of the sinner. The sinner owes everything to God, and God commands nothing of him that is not for his happiness here and hereafter. "My son," God says to him, "you owe Me obedience with life. I desire to make you happy on earth and in heaven; I com-

mand you to reverence My holy name, to honor your parents, to love your neighbor, to keep your heart pure and worthy of Me."—"I will not do it," the sinner answers, and he blasphemes, despises his parents, evokes hatred for his neighbor, and drags his body and soul in the mire of sin and wretchedness.

God is the immortal King of the ages. The angels ever adore Him, and the demons ever fear Him. All heaven is at His beck. The orbs above roll on in space in the manner He has traced for them. He calls to the stars, and they answer. He holds the earth in the three fingers of his hand. He commands the winds and the waves, and they obey. Good men make His pleasure the rule of their lives, and He governs all hell with an iron sceptre. Master of all, there is no creature that does not depend on Him. While all the elect of heaven, the angels and saints, and all creatures of earth, pay Him their heart-felt homage, a miserable being starts up, who lifts proudly his head, and questions God's authority; who attempts to cast the Almighty from His throne and to snatch the sceptre from His hand. Who is this rash creature, that, bold as Lucifer, cries our with him: *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars, I will be like the Most High!* (Is. xiv. 13.) It is none other than the sinner. And on whose head does he place God's crown? Who becomes the king of the sinner? *We have no king but Cæsar;* we do not want Jesus to be our king, cried the Jews who thirsted for the Saviour's blood. They did not want the royalty of the

Son of God, and their sacrilegious refusal drew on them the execration of the ages. But who is the Cæsar chosen by the sinner, when he wishes no longer to recognize the kingship and authority of Almighty God? It is Satan. On the head of this infamous varlet whom God drove out of His palace, the sinner would set the crown of which he robbed God. He swears allegiance to Satan, and promises to obey his orders—to blaspheme, to hate his neighbor—as the slave obeys his master. Satan breathes into the sinner's soul the poisonous blast of vice, and the sinner delivers his heart to guilty affections, and his body to infamous excesses. Such empire has Satan over the sinner's life, that we could not believe it, if experience did not assure us of the fact. Valerianus, a Roman emperor, permitted himself to be defeated in battle by Sapor, King of Persia. The conqueror bound the wretched emperor to the back of his chariot, and dragged him, like a slave, after him. He made a sort of stirrup of his unfortunate victim, and every time he mounted his horse Valerianus was forced to go on his knees, while the Persian ruler jumped from his shoulders on to his horse. What an indignity, savage hate, was this! It is a picture of the sinner. As long as he remained faithful to God, he was king of the world and his passions. When he permitted himself to be overcome by the the demon, he became the latter's slave, and is forced to obey his every command, the whim and desire of the most cruel tyrant that ever existed. You have read of the cruelties inflicted on souls that have been possessed by the devil; how that terrible

master torments them and carries them to every species of excess, while they are helpless in his hands. Yet all this cannot equal the horrid state of the sinner's soul when Satan has become master of it. Better were it to have a legion of devils in one's body than a single devil in one's soul.

The sinner is not only the slave of Satan, but also of all his agents. An infamous creature dictates laws to the sinner, and he obeys her—he that refused to obey God. He gives her service that he denies to God and man. He anticipates her wishes, hideous though they may be. He stands all the day long like a slave, ready to do her bidding, to satisfy her whims, to accomplish her difficult tasks. Was there ever such degradation, such inconsistency of poor deluded manhood? The sinner's passions are the agencies of Satan, and he is a slave to them. Holy Writ tells us that he who commits sin is the slave of sin, and to every admonition of God some passion offers an obstacle, a refusal. Avarice disobeys the call of God to restitution. Lust refuses the sacrifice of illicit love. Hatred casts aside the law of charity. Sensuality ignores the obligation of temperance. So we might run over the whole list of the sinner's vicious tendencies, and find him a slave to interior masters who darken his soul and degrade his manhood. Too true it is, that man's worst enemy is his own household. Before the sinner's fall how beautiful was his soul! God had made it full of harmony; now it is like a musical instrument that has been broken or jarred, and everything in it jingles in discord. The notes are harsh and

broken, and it is a torment to every one that hears it. It sounds forth no longer the melodies of grace to heaven. The soul under the dominion of passion is a most pitiable sight to God and angels, and it fills those who have love for God and fear for His power with inexpressible sorrow and dread. The poor victim of passion's rule is as sickening to look upon as a lifeless corpse suddenly met with, which makes one start back with overwhelming horror. The beautiful union of the sinner's soul with God is broken, and a dense cloud settles over his intellect and heart. He is entirely hidden from God's countenance, and the divine command has gone forth to cast him into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. O terrible spectacle! The blind, the deaf, and the dumb are not objects of pity so great as he. Ave, he is worse. He is as a leper crusted with awful disease—disease that is eating away the very substance of his being. Let us pray God never to enter under the slavery of passion, and ever to have a salutary horror of its cruel power.

The sinner acts as if he had abdicated reason and to him may be applied the saying of the Holy Ghost: *Fools despise wisdom.* God threatens sinners with the most terrible punishments, and opens to their gaze the abyss into which they will surely fall, if they persist in their sinfulness. He exhorts them to have a salutary fear of His justice and anger; but the sinner closes his eyes and ears to God's counsel and judgments. Passion speaks louder to him than the thunder of

God's wrath and the roaring of hell's flames. Even as he hangs over the infernal gulf, into which he may fall at any moment, he is bold enough to turn to God and cry, as Satan did: *I will not serve.* The sinner cannot be ignorant that God's judgments against him are terrible: *Are not these things stored up with Me?* (Deut. xxxii. 34.); that God will mete out to him the overwhelming penalties of His wrath: *Thou hast ordered all things in measure, number, and weight* Wisd. xi. 21.); and that as he has lived, so shall he be judged hereafter: *He that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh shall also reap corruption.* But habit, passion, and self have *straitened him on every side,* and God in His justice shall *beat him flat to the ground.* Aye, God's wrath *is nigh even at the doors* (St. Matt. xxiv. 33), but the sinner whom the Holy Ghost calls *foolish* continues in his disobedience, according to his hardened and impenitent heart, treasuring, as St. Paul says, to himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God.

The all-seeing eye of God witnesses the sinner's guilty acts and perceives the disordered desires and thoughts of his soul. It were not outrage enough to contemn the menaces of eternal justice, but the foolish sinner manifests his disloyalty even in God's presence, before that Supreme Majesty that is awful to angel and demon. Habitual sinners, blinded by excess of appetite and passion, become unconscious of the Divine Presence. Light has left them, decomposition and decay have entered their souls, and all idea that God is

ever-present in this vast world of ours has fast become a very faint perception. Reason, however, at times brings this truth of God's presence home to the heart of the sinner, and fear and remorse possess his soul: *Woe to us, because we have sinned.* (Lam. v. 16.) The sinner must at one time or another reflect that he commits deeds in God's presence which he would not do before the gaze of his fellow-men. The light at noonday is but a parable of God's all-seeing; His eyes are watchful day and night; His vision extends everywhere, from east to west, from pole to pole; and there is no man, except he be demented, who can profess with truth that he is unable to see this light. He may be in the darkness of sin; God still penetrates that darkness, which is the outer darkness that God has decreed for those who will not see and believe. Though the sinner were in his gloom of sin stone-blind, God ever sees him and marks his every thought, word, and act. The sinner, then, commits his sin in the spotless purity of God's holy presence. Now, having viewed the monstrous malice of mortal sin, we look almost instinctively to see who is the rebel that exalts his human will above the divine will, and presumes like Lucifer, to wage war against the Almighty, *O man, who art thou that replies against God?* (Rom. ix. 20.)

This rebel is a mere worm of the earth, that deserved to be crushed and destroyed, had not God's mercy interposed to save him; a grain of dust and ashes, born in spiritual death and lamentable helplessness. We were made by the Creator

like unto Himself, and God's handiwork, as the Bible says, was good; but by our fatal sin, we ruined God's work, defacing and falsifying His image. Therefore has a Council of the Church said that we have nothing of our own except falsehood and sin, because in disobeying God, we blackened our innocence and degraded our dignity. It were bad enough to be born in sin, to have our intellect enshrouded in ignorance, our heart poisoned by passion, and our will weakened by primitive disloyalty. Yet God, in His mercy, cured us of these hideous wounds in the saving waters of Baptism. It is a worse misfortune to find ourselves actual sinners before God. The man that says he has no sin, speaks not the truth. We are all conscious of sin ever since we were children; therefore, we are all guilty in God's sight. We have been disloyal to God all our lives, in greater or less degree. What are we, then, rebels against God's almighty power? We are as fruitless as the fig-tree mentioned in the Gospel, which the master spared till the third year, in hope of its bearing fruit. What are we, enemies of God through the commission of mortal sin? We are before heaven, "wandering stars whose light is dim or quenched;" autumn-trees, as the Apostle says, without fruit, that should be cut down and cast into the fire. And if we are but sin, we are also nothing, because of sin, in God's sight. We depend on God's providence, and have only a borrowed existence. If we possess faculties of soul and powers of body, it is because the God whom we defy and insult by sin has given them to us.

Our very continued existence is beholden to God's favoring will, and were He, for an instant, to withdraw His supporting hand, we would exist no more. Yet we use the power which He hath given us for noble purposes to make war upon Him; we waste, like the prodigal son, the paternal inheritance in riotous living. We are, then, in God's sight, on account of sin, as the orbs of heaven without light, trees without fruit, empty cisterns worthy of the judgment of heaven.

2. In the great injury we inflict on God by committing mortal sin, there is also included a manifest contempt for His power. The one seems to be a sequence of the other. Contempt for God is a most dangerous, a most fatal presumption.

What an outrageous, sacrilegious picture of contempt is that wherein the Jews maltreated the Blessed Saviour. Jesus went around everywhere among the Jews, as Sacred Writ tells us, doing good. He cured the sick and the infirm, raised the dead to life, restored sight to the blind, and gave speech to the dumb. He preached His heavenly doctrines to the Jews and disclosed to them the infinite justice, goodness, and wisdom that were embosomed in Him. Pilate, who saw His innocence (for he knew that it was from jealous hatred Jesus was delivered to him), endeavored to find some expedient to save Him from Jewish fury. At the Paschal Feast, it was the custom to liberate a prisoner at the request of the people. Pilate, therefore, presented Jesus, an innocent victim who had, as he said, done no evil, but who, on the contrary, had visited His brethren

with marvellous favors; he showed them Jesus, their God, their Saviour—Jesus, Beauty that ravishes the angels, and at the same time, he presented to them a malefactor, a seditious person, an infamous assassin and bandit, named Barabbas. The Roman governor asked the Jewish populace, which of the two would he liberate unto them—Christ or Barabbas? What did these wretches reply? *But they said Barabbas.* Then Pilate asked them what he would do with Jesus that is called Christ, and they answered: *Let Him be crucified.* Pilate was weak and unjust enough to deliver Him into the hands of His sworn enemies, and they took Him away and crucified Him. What a monstrous injustice was this! What contempt for the Son of God!

Do we not repeat this same sacrilegious act every time that we commit mortal sin? We draw the sword and bend the bow to slay Christ, when we dare to do sin and disobedience. Hence the Psalmist says: *The wicked have drawn the sword, they have bent their bow.* (Ps. xxxvi. 14.) Our grievous acts are death-producing acts. When the detractor utters his poisoned and virulent talk against his neighbor, when the blasphemer breaks into impious declarations against his Maker, when the sensualist delivers his soul and body to the demon of lust, when the drunkard sells his manhood to the vice of gluttony, they all draw the sword to slay the Almighty and nail Jesus Christ again to the wood of Calvary. They are new executioners, new crucifiers of the Saviour. Hence St. Paul speaks of sinners as *crucifying again*

to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery. (Heb. vi. 6.) As St. Thomas explains the Apostle's words: "The sinner, in so far as he is able, gives the occasion for Christ to be crucified."

To contempt, the sinner adds another vice that is disgusting to God and man—the loathsome vice of ingratitude. When we were delivered from the bondage of Satan and admitted to God's friendship, God began to pour into our souls His light, wisdom, and strength, and constituted in His grace we were as safe from harm as the little one that Jesus took into His arms and blessed unto the edification of the people. But as we grew in years and in the knowledge of evil we gradually forgot our benevolent Maker, and sought to please men, self, and demon, to love the world and its sinful pleasures. All this time of oblivion of God, we were losing our character as servants of Jesus Christ. We were seeking, as St. Paul says, the things which were our own, and not the things which were Jesus Christ's. (Phil. ii. 21.) Was this consistent Christian conduct? Was it not, rather, open ingratitude to a generous and loving Creator? There is no way whereby the sinner shows ingratitude more boldly than by his loathsome pride. Jesus has counselled us to be *meek and humble of heart*, but the sinner in his dealings with God is filled to the brim of his soul with pride of his own will and pride of his own judgment. And when a man will exalt his puny judgment above God's law and counsels, he is in a very precarious state, and God's wrath is not

far from him. The world is full of such sinners, who are self-willed and arrogant in science, art, government, and religion. Pride is the canker of the soul, and it leads men to rely on their own judgments and to spurn the law of God. Now, apart from the fact that we owe all that we have : brains, riches, honor, esteem, and all faculties of body and soul to God, the generous Creator, we are treating Him ungratefully when we use His gifts to insult, outrage, and contemn Him. We are ungrateful when we refuse to follow in His blessed footsteps that would surely lead us to happiness and reward exceedingly great. What a terrible hold sin has on our souls! There is not a man in the wide world that is not at some time or other moved to repentance, to change of life from sin to goodness ; but vice has such a mastery over him, that he throws to the winds the inspirations of grace, the commandments of God, the advice of friends and directors. Sinners are led by the flesh, not by the Holy Spirit. What else but a world of iniquity and ingratitude can we expect from them? God is even merciful toward them. In their sins, He warns them of their danger by some terrible event, such as sudden death, serious sickness, loss of fortune and friends ; but they choose beforehand, like the Prophet Balaam, their own paths, and like Balaam, they will be numbered among the slain. O, deplorable, in truth, is the condition of reckless, ungrateful sinners! The grace of God is absent from them ; God's gifts have been suffocated, and sin has become sweeter to them than *the honey and the honeycomb.* Ingrati-

tude is a very odious thing. It is the most offensive and provoking charge we can make against another. What must such a reproach be when spoken from the lips of Divine Justice? *Oh, My people, what have I done to thee, or in what have I molested thee? Answer thou Me.* (Mich. vi. 3.) Again, God reproaches us: *I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised Me.* (Is. i. 2.) Let us have a salutary fear of God, and we shall not sin. The past, with its fearful rebellion against God's law and authority, ought to be sufficient to show us our folly and to spur us to repentance. Let us cry to the Lord with the Psalmist: *Pierce thou my flesh with Thy fear.* (Ps. cxviii. 120.) Let us be no longer "the servants of sin," but the servants of the mighty God. Let the Passion of Our Lord be ever before our minds, and we will not repeat the indignities and outrages of the Jews. Repentance, firm resolve to sin no more, and vigilance, will do the whole work of reparation, and make us what we were before sin —"the sons of God."

SERMON II.

TEMPTATION.

Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. (Tob. xi. 21.)

The principal word of this text, *temptation*, a word full of deep mystery, gives the key to the enigma: Why do the just suffer? What causes their suffering? For what reason do they appear to be more exposed to affliction than the wicked?

The lives of the saints are a strong confirmation of human and spiritual suffering. Abraham was sorely tried in his life, and Job endured temptation of such an extreme character that the world has never seen its equivalent. You know, says St. James, the trial of Job, and he compares the just man's patience to that of a husbandman who waits for the precious fruit of the earth, *patiently bearing till he receive the early and the latter rain* (St. James v. 7.) Esther had her severe trials to endure; the whole history of the Machabees is a vivid picture of affliction and tribulation, and since Our Lord's time, the Church in all her course through the ages, all her children in general, and the greatest saints in particular—all have been constrained to bear the brunt of warfare and trial, and suffer the fire of Satanic and human persecution. God metes out, in accordance with His wisdom, trials,

temptations, and afflictions to every soul. There is no exception. As we know from the lives of the saints, the ascetics of the Thebaid and the Orient were tempted by God and Satan; their superiors subjected them to various ordeals, and they severely afflicted themselves. St. Anthony's temptations are well known. The combats which we sustain on the mountain, he said, are terrible. In religious life, trials are at once the crucible in which vocation is purified, the touchstone which reveals it, and the temper which, like steel, strengthens and hardens it. How can any man expect to be exempt from temptation in this busy, wicked world? *Son*, says the Wise Man, *when thou comest to the service of God,....prepare thy soul for temptation.* (Ecclus ii. 1.) "I have never known a soul, howsoever exalted, that did not have to undergo temptations," said the author of the *Imitation*. St. Paul, *a vessel of election*, received, the buffets of Satan, and when, for the third time he besought his deliverance, he was told by God: *My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity* (2 Cor. xii. 9.), a saying which reveals to us the merit and happy effect of temptation. And to encourage our despondent heart, St. Paul also tells us: *God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it* (1 Cor. x. 13.) It is Our Lord's wish that we pray not that we may be free from temptation, but that we may not succumb to it.

Let us consider what is temptation, what are its

diversity and multiplicity, and what we should do to resist it successfully.

1. The word, *to tempt*, may be taken in a good or a bad sense.

It may mean *to try*, as when we put on a garment. It is a matter of some consideration when we shall wear this article of clothing, where we shall wear it, and for what purpose we shall wear it. Shall we appear in it publicly or assume it only privately, so as not to excite comment or ridicule? After this preparation, we cut it, add to it, modify, or entirely change it. We are *clothed with Jesus*, as was Jacob with Esau's garment, and we ought to retrench our looks and words, add to our fervor, modify our conduct, transform, that is to say, supernaturalize our lives, so that we may appear with honor and merit on the great day of universal judgment.

To tempt may mean *to risk*, to run a chance, to expose to danger, to accept a light loss in order to safeguard a greater interest, just as the seaman does when he throws over a part of his cargo in a storm to save his ship. We must sacrifice time to eternity, material goods for spiritual treasures; risk a loss and renounce a gain, so as not to violate God's law, or the precept of the Church or the rights of conscience.

To tempt may mean again *to risk* one's tranquillity, reputation, even life itself, against raillery, attacks, and persecution.

It may further mean *to put to the test* objects or persons that we employ, such as a servant or friend, before we place confidence in him.

We, the servants and friends of God, the *vessels* of God, are put to the proof in this world before we receive the treasures of His grace and the day of His glory in the next world.

Temptation, then, no matter what be its source, is not of itself an evil, but a fruitful occasion of merit, inasmuch as it purifies the soul by suffering, and gives it the opportunity to manifest its love.

Temptation may come directly from God. We read in Sacred Writ: *God tempted Abraham.* (Gen. xxii. 1.) The demon may superadd to it by his malice, as he did in the case of holy Job. Temptation may spring from temperament, humor, weakness, surroundings, particular circumstances. It is certainly inherent in our lives in so far as we are travellers toward the heavenly country; it is inevitable in some form or another on the way; it is necessary for our sanctification. The just are strengthened by temptation, the fearful lose courage in it, the weak abandon God's service through it, and the impious find in it a new subject for blasphemy. In the times of the early persecutions, we can count a host of invincible martyrs, but we also number a large crowd of miserable apostates.

There is nothing more consoling, though most mysterious, than the view of the temptations endured by our Blessed Saviour, *tentatus per omnia.* He was assailed by temptation not only in the desert, but during His entire career by His enemies. He often said to them: *Why do you tempt Me?* (St. Matt. xxii. 18.) His sacred Passion was one long continued temptation from Gethsemane to Calvary, till the last sigh: *Why hast Thou*

forsaken Me? (St. Mark xv. 34.) The Christian soul ought, then, to expect the attacks of temptation, to be prepared for them, and not to be astonished nor discouraged when they come to it. As the Apostle says: *Count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations.* (St. James i. 2.) The soul ought to fight, pray, and exercise itself with temptation, and depart from it inured to its hardships, stronger and braver for its next assaults. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.* (Apoc. ii. 10.)

2. The causes which produce temptations, the sources whence they emanate, the ends designed by the tempter, and the temperament and character of each soul, constitute at once the *multiplicity* and *diversity* of temptations. They may be natural or supernatural, accordingly as they come from God, the demon, or creatures of the visible world. Again they may be external, such as those which proceed from persons and things, relatives, friends, enemies, wealth, pleasures, or the senses; they may be internal, such as those which come from the suggestions of the devil, from interior weariness, sadness, or disgust. "Our inclinations," says St. Peter Damien, "conspire with the demon to tempt us." St. James, in his Epistle, advises us of the same fact: *Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence.* St. Anthony once saw the demon spreading nets all over the face of the world. According to the Beloved Disciple, *the whole world is seated in wickedness* (1 John v. 19.), and to put in a few words and to reduce to three sources all temptations, we may say that

they come from the devil, the world, and the flesh.

The malice of Satan is well portrayed to us in his temptation of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, and his consequent victory over them by means of their consenting to his temptation. From that eventful day, Satan has ever been man's declared enemy. *I will put enmity*, said the Lord God, *between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.* (Gen. iii. 15.) Satan's whole occupation, since Adam's fall, has centered in one continued effort to destroy man's happiness through the evil effects of temptation. Man is his prey, and he endeavors by every possible means to ensnare or entrap man. He follows, observes, and besieges man everywhere. There is no locality, no corner or nook in creation, to which he does not penetrate. His strength is marvellous, and from the exhibition of it which he has given, as recorded in the Bible, he would soon destroy the human race, if the omnipotent arm of God did not restrain him. The Holy Book tells us that on one occasion he drove the swine into the lake, and filled the whole province with terror. He is certainly known to have slain entire armies in a night; he killed the seven husbands of Sarah; he maltreated the virtuous Job so cruelly that the latter has ever been a monument of Satan's malice to succeeding ages. Satan often revolutionizes Nature: he stirs up frightful storms and tempests which ravage the world, and he is the author of many pests and fatal contagions. Of ourselves, we would be at serious disadvantage in our contest with the Prince of Evil. He has in his favor the infinite subtility of his spiritual nature,

which far excels the craft and diplomacy of our humanity, and he has also the experience of thousands of years. Satan has observed and studied human nature, every man's temperament and character; and he knows each one's predominant failing, darling sin, and powerful passion. *As a roaring lion*, says St. Peter, *he goeth about seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Peter v. 8.) An old and skilful commander is worth more than battalions and regiments. Satan is such a leader, and to his black malice and cunning, to the deceits and wiles which he, as the father of lies, adopts as a part of his programme, he unites the overbearing pride that drove him out of heaven, the pride that makes him dare everything, and that is daily increased by his victories over millions of souls. He stalks forth a merciless and arrogant victor. He dragged with him in his fall a third part of heaven's inhabitants. He stops at nothing to entrap distinguished souls as prey. He overcame Adam, sheltered in the innocence of Paradise; he seduced Judas, basking in the presence of his Divine Master; and he ensnared Solomon, hedged around with wisdom, such as the world had never witnessed. Daily he overturns great and holy souls, *cedars of Libanus*, in church and state. His infernal work never ceases; he never wearies of destroying souls; and while man is at peace with the whole world, he is never at peace with the king of hell.

The world is the second source of temptation. We renounced the world, as we renounced Satan, in our Baptismal promises. But the world draws

us, as does Satan, to sin. The world seduces us and acquires sway over our hearts by presenting to us objects that gratify our affections. There is a specious, gilded appearance in the things of the world that strongly attracts us, and it is only by the grace of God we are restrained from running after them. *The creatures of God are turned to an abomination, and a temptation to the souls of men, and a snare to the feet of the unwise.* (Wisd. xiv. 11.) "Which way soever we go forth," says St. Ambrose, "there are many snares. We must fear, even in undertakings for virtue a snare in embracing a state of chastity and perfection." Not only do the objects of the world allure us, but the company of worldly men attracts us powerfully. The danger which arises from their discourse and example is so great, that we must be ever on our guard lest we imitate them: *Beware, therefore that you imitate not the doings of others, and be afraid, and the fear of them should seize upon you.* (Bar. vi. 4.) Besides, the elements of persecution, human respect, and folly unite to produce in us an irresistible desire to act, speak, and behave like the showy, bold creatures of the world. The example of Solomon, who began his downward career by frequenting the company of strange women, ought to be a powerful incentive to us to have no commerce with worldly-minded people.

The flesh is the third source of temptation. Of all the evils which afflict us, there is none stronger or more paramount than the concupiscence which we carry in our own bosom. The other sources of temptation are exterior, and would

have but little strength without the concurrence of our concupiscence. The devil and the world incite man's passions and appetites to withdraw from all dutiful submission to God's law. Satan employs this concupiscence of the flesh as an agency to carry out his nefarious projects. *Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured. Then when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.* (St. James i. 14-15.) We should fear this enemy, because it is a furious and domestic enemy. It is apparently a friend, and is yet an implacable foe, and while we are terrified at its violent motions and tendencies, we are bound by the law of our nature to feed and nourish it. When we endeavor to tame and restrain it, we find it offering a powerful resistance. Even St. Paul, worn out by fatigue and labor, complained of its excesses: *I see*, he said, *another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. vii. 23, 24.)

These three enemies of our salvation never cease to attack us either by open war or secret stratagem. Even when we are apparently at peace, we can have no assurance that they are not plotting our downfall. Hence St. Augustine says: "Let the soldier of Christ be always armed, always solicitous and watchful, more fearful in peace than in war." On the issue of our battle with temptation depends an eternity of infinite weal or woe.

3. How shall we resist successfully the onslaughts

of temptation? We must first ask God to grant us the grace of humility. *He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. x. 12.) To be properly prepared for temptation, we must have a great diffidence in our strength, because of ourselves we can do nothing. *Without Me*, says Christ, *you can do nothing.* Humility is necessary throughout the whole spiritual life; but it is especially necessary in dealing with our spiritual enemies. Our own self-knowledge tells us how humble we should be. We look at our varied lives, and what scars, seams, and wounds sin and temptation have inflicted on them! How insignificant has been our career! Our best deeds in God's sight have been worth nothing, because they were attributable to God, not to ourselves. We are as beholden to God for life as the drowning person is to his rescuer. We have been unprofitable servants who have given no recompense of industry to God. All created things render due service to their Maker: the sun gives its light, and the tree bears its fruit in due season.

All creatures glorify God save man alone. What has the Lord received from us? Nothing but disloyalty and contempt. We ought to confess our humility *with fear and trembling*. If we think that we can master the wind of temptation of ourselves, we are sadly mistaken, and are guilty of presumption; and having such an exalted idea of our own ability, we need expect no help from God; for God will never assist a man who is strong in his own conceit. We see how Adam

fell. While he was yet in a state of innocence, free from concupiscence and that weakness of will which we inherit as the effect of his sin, he fell by the sin of disobedience. The cause of his fall was his confidence in his own strength and his neglect to call on God in his trouble. St. Peter presumed on his good resolutions, which were seemingly the strongest, and fell into the sin of denying his Lord and Master. It is the office of grace to help us in our temptations, and when we foolishly and arrogantly strive to measure power with Satan, without the aid of grace, we are sure to fail miserably and to end unfortunately. *There is no help to me in myself.* (Job vi. 13.)

But in this contest with the powers of evil, despondency or cowardice is as fatal as presumption. When a man's spirits are depressed, or he has lost all heart, he cannot fight bravely or boldly. In time of battle a soldier needs courage, and in time of temptation a Christian must have fortitude. True courage does not consist in depising danger, nor in ridiculing the powers of the enemy. Most men who despise their opponents generally suffer defeat. A famous warrior once saw a soldier pause before a cannon with white face and nervous feeling, and then saw him march boldly toward the enemy, and he pronounced the man a hero. True courage looks danger in the face, measures the extent of its power or force, and then goes fearlessly to meet it. It is the same with spiritual warfare. We are surrounded by temptations; we have them living in our own bosom. If we are unconscious of their presence

we are like a man in the midst of a forest of flame who hears not the crackling of the fire around him. There are temptations of manifold and varied character ever assailing us, and if we are not brave and strong enough to conquer them, they will crush us under their overpowering weight. We must enter into this holy war against temptation with all the foresight and determination of a disciplined, systematic, and prudent soldier. We must observe closely the danger, study the movements of the tempter, and detect his stratagem and tactics. We know that he is a fallen angel who has lost eternal glory, but whose intelligence, power, and craft are simply marvellous. We cannot afford to despise him, nor underrate his strength; and while we await his onslaught, we are not such fools as to laugh at his method of warfare. Rather, when we know his power, skill, and science, we shall mistrust our own defence, and trust in the almighty power of God, who alone can conquer him, and who is ever present to us. Therefore, we shall not lose heart. When the servant of Eliseus saw his master and himself surrounded by the army of the Syrians, he shook with fear. The prophet said to him: *Fear not, for more are with us than with them; and the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; and behold the mountain filled with horses and fiery chariots.* (4 Kings vi. 16, 17.) God's angels are encamped around us—twelve legions of them—which Jesus in His Passion would not call to His aid. But we shall have them with us, and shall fight bravely when we feel that God is round about us.

Who that has ever read the pathetic history of Job under affliction, has not felt encouraged by it, and has not blessed God for His mercies and the ultimate protection of this virtuous king by divine goodness? Oh, the misery of wretched Job! All sores from head to foot, seated on a dunghill, separated from men, stripped of his children and possessions, and upbraided by his associate kings, and even by his wife! Was there ever such a picture of woe and despair? But in the midst of all his trials and temptations, he trusted in God: *Though He kill me, yet will I trust in Him.* (Job xiii. 15.) Patience brought its reward, and it was reward sevenfold. We know of the temptations of St. Paul, who was assailed by the devil and the flesh, and when he cried to God for relief, he was disappointed in not receiving it. But his prayer was soon heard, and more than heard, for the grace of God was made perfect in his weakness. We are likewise assisted in our temptations. As a modern writer has said: "If you walk in the furnace like the three faithful sons of Israel, there is yet a fourth ever with you and He is the Son of God." Let us, then, fight bravely with Satan and the powers of evil; let us ask the Holy Ghost for the gift of fortitude, and no matter how severe our trials may be, to us the words of the Prophet will be fulfilled: *When thou shall pass through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee; when thou shalt walk in the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, and the flames shall not burn in thee.* (Is. xliii. 2.)

The words of our Blessed Lord tell us how to

resist temptation: *Watch ye and pray, that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (St. Mark xiv. 38.) We may have the best intention to contest every inch of ground with our spiritual enemies, but we must always discount on our weakness, and hope for nothing unless God be with us. God will not be with us, if, relying on our own paltry strength, we go forth and challenge the enemy when the spirit of God does not call us to battle. We must watch over ourselves, so that the enemy may not take us at a disadvantage. If in this life we were aware that an enemy was dogging our steps and watching to waylay us with the purpose of taking our life, would we not be most vigilant, and take no risk in such serious danger? How we would watch also the enemy, and give him no occasion to surprise us! Satan is always watching us, plotting our destruction day and night. He perceives an act, hears a word, sees an unguarded moment, and he is ever ready to pounce upon us and do his fatal work.

We must watch him in return—watch him closely and constantly. Our vigilance must be universal, so that we may not be destroyed. *With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it.* (Prov. iv. 23.) He would be an imprudent and blamable commander who, in defending the city entrusted to him, would leave an open breach in its wall or a gate unfastened. The matter of victory would be easy to the enemy. When we watch only one side, the devil is bound to attack us on the other, where he finds an open door and

ready opportunity for his assault. The only safeguard we have is perpetual vigilance. We must place the sentinel of the soul, our will, on its watch-tower that commands a view from every side, and then only can we be sure that we shall not be surprised by the open warfare or secret undermining of the Prince of Evil. *Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man.* (St. Luke xxi. 36.) We must also pray against succumbing to the onslaught of temptation. Prayer is a mighty power in our battles with the enemy. By prayer, Judith returned chaste and triumphant from the camp of Holofernes; Daniel was preserved in the lion's den, and the three Hebrew children were unscathed in the fiery furnace. By prayer, the saints conquered repeatedly hell and its malicious minions. Amalec was the type of Satan, and he opposed God's designs by endeavoring to prevent the Israelites from entering the promised land, but prayer, as well as arms, defeated his impious plan. *Whilst Josue fought, Moses went to the mountain to pray, and whilst he lifted up his hands, Israel overcame; but if he in the least let them fall, Amalec began to recover himself.* (Exod. xvii. 12.) We find our Blessed Lord preparing Himself for temptation by prayer and fasting in the desert. Prayer should be our armor, and by it we shall prevail over the enemy. *In Thee I shall be delivered from temptation, and in my God I shall pass over the wall.* (Ps. xvii. 30.) St. John Climacus tells us: "As

thieves do not easily rob in places that are fortified and guarded, so the devil, the spiritual robber of our souls, can never plunder those who have always prayer—their spiritual arms, as it were—in their hands." Let us fight them bravely, for God will be with us in our warfare against evil, though we see him not. St. Antony was assailed in his thirty-fifth year by a very violent temptation, and the Evil One exercised against him his rage in a visible frightful manner. When the temptation was over, and the saint was left by the fiend half-dead in his ruined cell, Jesus visited him, filling his abode with light, and his soul with the sweetness of His presence. Antony, sighing, said to Him: "Where wast Thou, good Jesus? Where wast Thou from the beginning of my conflict? Why wast thou not with me?" But he heard a voice answering him: "Antony, I was here, and I beheld thy battle and victory, and because thou didst not yield, I strengthened thee." True it is that God encourages and assists us in our contest with the powers of evil. Hence St. Augustine tells us: "God Himself delights in the spectacle of a Christian under temptation, and says to him: 'I behold you from heaven; fight—conquer; I will crown you!'"

SERMON III.

THE OCCASIONS OF SIN.

He that loveth danger shall perish in it. (Ecclus. iii. 27.)

This is the counsel of the Holy Ghost, which ought to be engraved on memory's tablet and written in the depths of our souls. If we should ever have the misfortune to forget this truth or to disregard its all-important meaning, we would jeopardize our peace of mind here and our happiness hereafter. The danger which is mentioned in the text, is the danger of offending God, or rather, it is the occasion which leads to that danger. We find everywhere the occasions of grievous sin, and yet it may be a rare occurrence for men to fall into them. It is not of such occasions we speak, for if we were bound to avoid them at all times, we must needs give up life and abandon the world. It is a question here of the exterior and proximate danger of offending God by dwelling in occasions where sin is paramount in producing sin. According to theologians, the occasion of sin is some external circumstance which draws man frequently into sin, either by its own power or by reason of the weakness of him who is placed in it. It is not, then, an internal propensity inclining man to evil, but it is the

influence of the external object, seconding and exciting the perverse inclination which resides within us. For every Christian soul this danger is a subject of serious and thoughtful consideration. In what company or place, in what intimacy or pleasure, do you fall frequently into mortal sin? Your conscience will give you quickly the answer. You know then the occasions of sin, as far as your danger is concerned.

We should reflect on the obligations which rest with us to avoid the occasions of sin in general and in particular, and to understand the danger which results from them.

1. Experience, which is the best teacher of spiritual life, tells us that we have often fallen in the past on account of our seeking the occasions of sin, and there exists a strong likelihood that we shall fall again, unless we avoid such occasions. Can any reasonable man doubt the event of his fall? When the circumstances of his life are the same, will not that again happen which happened before? External circumstances do not generally change, and a man's internal state remains the same. Are we not the same persons now as when we fell into sin, having the same passions and weakness, the same fickleness and inconstancy of will? Time has not extinguished in us the fuel of concupiscence. Are we not, then, forced to battle against the temptations which have formerly caused our relapse? The flesh rises and fights against the spirit as before. Is the effervescence of passion any the less? Is not concupiscence inflamed with the same facility? Does it not burn

with even greater violence? Yes, we may sin again, and will likely sin again, if we do not fly from the occasions that lead us into sin. The spark that may light up such a conflagration is hidden under the ashes; the serpent whose head has not been entirely crushed, may wound us again with its poisoned fang.

Our own weakness is the source of our likelihood to fall again into sin. When the storms raised by Satan begin to do their devastating work, the loftiest and strongest cedars of Libanus are known to succumb to their violence. It is only in the fear of the Lord that we can find security. *In the fear of the Lord is the confidence of strength.* (Prov. xiv. 26.) We are as brittle glass, that must be removed from danger to be preserved. Neither does God favor us with His grace and strength when we throw ourselves wilfully into the occasions of sin. We cannot expect His assistance in such conjunctures, for He has declared that He will not hearken to the persistent obdurate sinner, but will leave him to die in his sin. His justice demands that He should ignore us, when we have no care for our souls and are ever seeking the occasions and means to destroy them. Were God to hold out a helping hand to us in our continued sinfulness, and lift us up always when we are doing nothing for our own salvation, we would certainly become careless and slothful instead of being watchful and industrious for our eternal salvation. God does not multiply miracles unnecessarily, and it would be to work a miracle without necessity to help a man

in spiritual straits who has the means of securing victory by flying from sin, but who seeks deliverance after he has deliberately run into the hands of his enemy. Not thus Our Lord acted in His earthly career. When He was tempted by the devil, who asked Him to throw Himself down from the temple so that the angels might support and carry Him, He rejected the suggestion, because it was a temptation, and its execution meant an unnecessary miracle. *It is written*, He said to the Evil One, *thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*. Had Noe requested God to preserve him from the deluge, after refusing or neglecting to build the ark, as God commanded him, would he not have been guilty of great presumption? If Lot, amidst the flames of Sodom, had called on God to work a miracle in his favor, after he had been ordered to leave the doomed city, would we not consider his conduct as equally foolish and rashly presumptuous? We make as great a display of arrogant presumption when we ask God to save us from the fire of sin into which we have gone voluntarily, deliberately, and repeatedly. When we deal with God in this manner, we are only reiterating the hypocrisy and insincerity of the Jews by tempting Him. The Jews asked Christ whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, while they were devising in their hearts to catch Him in His speech. Are we not as hypocritical, when, after praying the Lord *to lead us not into temptation*, we run at the same time openly into temptation and become lamentably our own tempters? We aim at imposing on God

who sees and knows every thought and desire of our souls. If we expose our corporal lives to danger, we are guilty of serious sin; how much greater are the peril and sin when we expose our souls—jeopardize our eternity?

But men will say when counselled to beware of the occasions of sin, that experience has made them wiser, that danger no longer entices them. Men will use such language, and in a short interval fall shamefully into their former vices. If they had really become wiser from their repeated falls into sin, would we not naturally think that they ought not to brave danger, but like the child burnt once by the fire, carefully avoid it? To judge by the conduct of these inconsistent mortals, we are led to believe that, instead of having become wiser, they have become self-sufficient and possessed of that rashness that receives its chastisement in the facility with which they fall into the most shameful excesses. Experience ought to teach man to avoid danger. And to shun danger, no one can trust to his talent, intelligence, ability, or judgment; no one can rely on his knowledge, sharpness, or wit; all this will not fortify a man against evil, but rather cherish and encourage his pride, the mother of countless sins. History tells us that the most eminent men have ignominiously fallen. David, a just man and powerful king, fell into the crimes of adultery and murder; Solomon, the wisest man on earth, fell into sensuality and idolatry; Judas, who was one of Christ's chosen twelve, fell into covetousness, betrayal of his Divine Master, and

suicide ; Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, fell into denial of his Lord. Their unfortunate example proves conclusively that men of the highest rank and rarest ability are likely, like other mortals, to succumb to the urgent occasions of sin. A man's virtue, dignity, or knowledge is not a safeguard against the potent seductions of sin, and if any one dare to pretend that personal qualities or perfections remove from the occasions of sin all power to do harm, he will soon see rising up against him a multitude of contradictors, aged heroes trained in the school of virtue, who, trembling even now at the sight of their moral weakness and the fragility of human nature, will stand up to refute the arrogance of his foolish pretensions.

It is by favor of man's presumption that the devil accomplishes his capital labor of leading souls into sin. He first seduces men into the occasions of sin, and gradually draws them into his nefarious plans at pleasure. He presents to their minds occasions as divested of all that could make them harmful, and as he deals with souls filled with conceit and self-love, he accomplishes easily his wicked design of overwhelming them with sin. When once men are ensnared into Satan's toils, they become his dupes and slaves, always ready to do his bidding. See how Satan effected the fall of man. He did not openly attempt to drive our first parents into disobedience of God's law. He used craft and deceit. He directed Eve's looks to the beautiful fruit of Paradise, and she, prompted by curiosity, gazed on the fruit forbidden her to eat; she saw

it was agreeable, and considered it, till her heart was possessed with it; then Satan allured her to eat of it, to transgress God's order; and Adam consenting to her sin, she entailed on her posterity that incalculable woe which has been the source of our earthly misery. From the consciousness of our own weakness, and the knowledge of the incessant war waged on us by Satan, we ought to fear the occasions of sin—the chief agencies whereby we ruin our souls; and the man who best understands human nature and its inherent feebleness, will not find his mainstay in virtue, ability, or science, but in his own infirmities. St. Paul inculcates this with all the frankness of an apostle: *He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. x. 12.) This advice the Apostle gives to all, which shows that there is danger for all in the occasions of sin.

St. Cyprian calls sinful occasions "a pestilence and hidden contagion;" St. Bernard says that they are "a plague which enters subtly and takes possession of the mind, and unless it is quickly driven out, it allures and sets it on fire;" St. Augustine warns us against danger: "Believe one who knows it; I do not lie before God, but I have found the pastors of flocks, cedars of Libanus, falling under this pestilence, of whose fall I had no more suspicion than that of Jerome or Ambrose." St. Gregory Nazianzen calls the occasion of sin "the basilisk of wickedness." In ancient days, it was believed that the look of this venemous reptile was fatal to the beholder, and thus the proximate occasions of sin is a poisoned

atmosphere in which souls are drawn to wickedness, and breathe in eternal death. Some places, company, books, and employments are permeated with the deadly vemon of sin, and when we persist in entertaining a strong predilection for them, in possessing and enjoying them, we are certainly courting danger, and will in all probability perish in it. *Blessed is the man that is always fearful: but he that is hardened in mind shall fall into evil.* (Prov. xxviii. 14.)

Again, what is it that obliges us particularly to shun the occasions of sin? It is the probability that we shall fall into sin. This probability is very great when we venture upon the same ground on which we have formerly fallen into sin. In natural things, we regard the regular repetition of the same facts as a certain rule; we conclude that the same effect will be produced by the same cause. The weather-vanes on our roofs and the mercury in the barometer, are proofs of this rule. We notice that the condition of the atmosphere and the direction of the winds exercise a marked influence on the temperature. These observations have become the basis of certain rules, generally recognized as exact, though at times faulty, as experience shows. We are of the opinion that the winds bring, according to their changes, heat or cold, humidity or drought; that the weather will be fair or stormy according to the rise or fall of the mercury.

This rule has been applied by the Fathers of the Church to moral things, and experience proves that effects have followed the rule more

immediately in the moral, than in the natural order. The indications of the barometer are sometimes false; the direction of the winds is not always fixed and sure; but very rarely is it that we see a man exposed to the occasions of sin without falling. Of all the Doctors of the Church, St. Augustine has clung most closely to this rule. "He," says the saint, "that does not want to fly from danger, will surely perish in it." The great Church-father simply repeated in these words the oracle long ago spoken by the Wise Man: *He that loveth danger shall perish in it.*

When the young man mentioned in the Gospel, asked Our Lord to point out to him the way of salvation, Jesus said to him, *Follow Me.* The young man assented to the invitation, but besought permission to go home and bury his father. Christ answered: *Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.* (St. Luke ix. 60.) We are bound by divine and natural law to honor and respect our parents; yet Christ forbade this young man to perform a filial duty toward his deceased parent. St. Ambrose explains the situation by telling us that this young man's father was an unbeliever, and if the son went home to bury his father, he would be thrown among his father's unbelieving friends, and likely fall himself into infidelity. "The son is not summoned away," says the saint, "from his duty to his father, but is separated from perfidious communion." Christ also teaches us how to shun the occasions of sin in plainer words: *If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for*

it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body be cast into hell. (St. Matt. v. 29.) By the eye is meant that thing which is most dear to us, which we love as the apple of our eye; and no matter what it is, employment, pleasure, benefit, or person, as long as the occasion of sin is presented, we must shun it and cast it from our souls and presence. "In the occasion of sin," says St. Augustine, "take flight, if you would find victory."

But you may say: the best swimmer is often drowned; the finest duellist falls at length. This is more than a mere popular saying—it is revealed truth; and it only goes to prove that a rash man who trusts to his own strength and exposes himself to danger, will, as a rule, expiate his boldness by a shameful fall. Who could ever believe that a simple occasion would cause St. Peter to fall? Yet that apostle had said that he would follow his Master even unto death, and had boldly declared: *Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized.* (St. Matt. xxvi. 33.) In his temerity, he exposed himself to danger; he went with the crowd, *that he might see the end.* He mixed up with those who had only cold indifference for Jesus, if not dark hatred. He fell; he denied his Lord and Master. He wept bitterly for his fall. Those bitter tears warn us of our danger; they speak eloquently to us to shun the occasions of sin. The crowing of the cock also reminds us of danger, as it did Peter, of his sin; it reminds us of the obligation to avoid the occasions of sin, if we do not wish to perish eternally.

2. What is it that especially makes the obligation of avoiding the occasions of sin so rigorous? It is the certainty of falling, the almost inevitable necessity of committing sin. In speaking in this manner, I do not claim that a man who exposes himself to the danger of committing sin may not be exempt from sin. I mean a *moral impossibility* which makes the thing extremely difficult, and which draws the sinner almost without resistance. Such was the lot of Samson. In the midst of sin, says Holy Writ, he did not know *that the Lord was departed from him.* (Judg. xvi. 20.) He lost the sight of his eyes, his strength, and liberty. Such is also the lot of him who exposes himself rashly to danger. He loses the sight of his eyes; his understanding is darkened by the smoke of his passions; he loses his strength; the violence of temptation, the weakness of his will, so often vanquished, reduce him to a powerless condition, and remove from him the strength of resistance. He loses his liberty, and with God taking away His grace, it is morally impossible that he should not consent to sin. But, you may say, has not God promised the help of His grace to all? Yes, grace has been promised to him that prays for it, but not to him that tempts God. It is written, says the Saviour: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

Divine Wisdom distributes with order and measure the gifts and strength of the Holy Ghost; it is not man's will that disposes of them. To expect help from on high, after making ourselves unworthy of it by exposing ourselves voluntarily to danger, is to expect what God has never prom-

ised, what is directly opposed to His wisdom—to expect, in a word, a miracle of grace. When we act in this way, we tempt Almighty God, and we are like those who would throw themselves in the midst of flames with the foolish hope of escaping unscathed from them. If God, to punish us, abandon us, we ought not to be astonished; His assistance in such circumstances has not been promised us. And even if we were to suppose that God would work a miracle of grace and save us from falling in the proximate occasion of sin, yet would we have violated the natural law which forbids every man to expose himself without necessity to the danger of losing God's friendship.

Again, to shun the occasions of sin, we ought to convert these occasions into means of virtue. A bird that is tied by the foot may spring back and flutter as if it had recovered its freedom, but it is always restrained at pleasure. The same occasion will always have its danger; therefore let it be changed into a harmless occasion. If you read the lives of the saints, the lives of those holy penitents who shine as lamps to direct sinners in their repentance, you will find that there is not one of them who did not renounce with their sins their former course of life, and begin a new life of devotion and regularity, penance, retirement, and recollection in God. They shunned particularly former company, public gatherings, and even innocent diversions, to be more secure in their labor to sanctify their souls. St. Gregory observes that St. Peter is said to have returned, for some time

after his conversion, to his avocation of a fisherman, but that St. Matthew quitted forever his position in the custom-house, because this latter occupation was an occasion of sin on account of its extortion and injustice, while the former was a necessary and harmless employment. This detail is worthy our consideration. What a change took place in the life of St. Mary Magdalen after her conversion to God! The Gospel speaks of her in her reckless, sinful life as a *woman that was in the city a sinner*, as if she were the only abandoned woman in the city. Yet this wicked woman became an extraordinary penitent, and so great was her repentance that she relinquished the city, the wicked conversation of men, the precious ointments, and all those things that formerly afforded her the occasions of sin. "She converted the number of her vices," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "into the number of her virtues." The city in which she lived, the home in which she dwelt, the persons whose company she frequented, the eyes by which she launched her arrows of illicit love, the golden tresses by which she captivated admirers, and the precious ointments wherewith she anointed her body,—all these were powerful occasions of sin to this vicious woman; but all these were changed into occasions of virtue, into means for doing penance and obtaining the sanctification of her soul. She quitted her native city and home to seek in a foreign land a cave; she bade good-bye to the society of men, to enjoy the conversation of the angels; she employed her eyes in shedding bitter tears of repentance, her precious ointments in

bathing the feet of her Lord and Master, and her golden tresses in wiping those same blessed feet. In fact, she changed all her former occasions of sin and riotous living into occasions of holiness and virtue, and she won by her long penance and by her great love, the favor of God and the reward of eternal glory.

We may all do this excellent service for ourselves. We have all our predilection for persons and objects that are he cause of serious sin to us. We frequent, perhaps, houses which are as the vestibule of hell to us; let us change these places of sin and become frequenters of the House of God, forsaking sin to acquire habits of devotion. We know that with the wicked we become wicked; let us in the future associate with the good, who will edify us and encourage us to work out our salvation. If our eyes, tongues, and feet have been the means of doing spiritual harm to our souls, let us henceforth employ these members in sanctifying our souls, in glorifying God, in obtaining our eternal destiny Let us remember that flight is not only a sure source of victory in avoiding the occasions of sin, but it is especially efficacious, often absolutely necessary, in guarding us against relapse into sin and in destroying evil habits. To fly from the occasions of sin may cost us much, but we must break the bonds that bind us to them, if we wish to be secure. It is often a sacrifice, almost as great as the loss of an arm or other member; but, as the Saviour tells us, better renounce sin than run the risk of eternal loss. Your conduct in abandoning danger may draw on you

the odium of the wicked, may cause even some commotion in the multitude, but these considerations are of small importance, when it is a question of duty, of protecting your eternal interests against ruin and woe. Probably in deserting the occasions of sin, you may be compelled to give up a lucrative business, or a position of gain and assurance, to sacrifice even your daily bread; but trust to Providence. When a man does his duty, the Lord has promised to provide for the remainder. It is not by bread alone that man lives; what we need most is the blessing of heaven over our lives, that blessing which has been promised to those who accomplish the will of God on earth, and who make it their duty to avoid, with all care and vigilance, whatever will lead them to sin and the imminent peril of eternal happiness.

SERMON IV.

DIVINE GRACE.

Behold I stand at the gate and knock: if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. (*Apoc.* iii. 20.)

The one great object of our Lenten exercises is to offer men the means whereby they may be delivered from the slavery of sin, become penitent of heart, and agreeable to the sinless presence of Almighty God. Probably it is only in such seasons as Lent that men make an effort to think on the dreadful condition in which their souls are placed. At such a penitential time they begin to reflect on the duties of their state of life, long neglected or forgotten, and recall the thought of salvation, imperilled by their adherence to temptation and sin. Lent is the spring-time of the soul, and in this holy season good Christians endeavor to excite themselves to penance and to sow in their hearts the seed of love and virtue.

As of ourselves we can do nothing deserving of eternal life and merit nothing at the hands of God but severe reprobation for our multiplied offences, we must look to heaven for mercy and special help to escape the punishment of Divine Justice, and to recover friendship with our offended Creator. We are as helpless as children just born

and our misery, black as death, moans pitifully to God for succor and strength. To avoid evil and do good we stand in need of grace. Grace is the supernatural and gratuitous gift of God by which our mind grasps the knowledge of real and supernatural good, and our will receives the strength and pleasant impulse to undertake and do good. Though somewhat positively distasteful to the sinner, grace besets his darkened heart, because it was created for it, and can find rest only in its depths. So great and noble a gift is grace, that the brute animals are incapable of possessing it, and demons are unworthy of it; on the throne of the human heart alone does it sit and exercise its sway. A winged messenger from heaven, bearing the tidings of God's benevolence and mercy, it hovers about the sinner, knocks at the door of his heart and entering, performs its salutary work of restoration of the soul to the delights of God's love. Grace is not restrictive or exclusive in its benign operations. It offers its help and comfort to all without exception to the faithful and the unfaithful, to sinner and the just, to the predestined and the reprobate to all it offers the honor of its presence and the privilege of its power. "Grace," says St. Chrysostom, "offers itself readily to all, and calls all with equal honor."

Grace satisfies the greatest need of human nature. "All men," says St. Augustine, "seek after some substantial good, and with the prophet, they cry: 'Who showeth us good things?'" To find that appreciable good, many roam over the world, seeking in vain in external things—in wealth,

pleasure, travel, and sin—for that good which can alone satisfy their hearts. If they but considered how generously God comes to their assistance by offering them His holy grace, the only substantial, satisfying good on earth, and the only source of happiness hereafter, they would be spared much labor, solicitude, and peril. Let us consider the necessity and importance of grace as the one sole agency by which we may arise from the misery of sin to the light of eternal salvation.

1. If we are well-meaning and anxious to attain to eternal happiness, we will labor with all our hearts and souls; if we are sinners, to be converted to God; and if we are just, to persevere in our state of justice and goodness. But the all-important question arises: how can the sinner who is God's most pronounced enemy be converted to Him, and how can the just man who is weak and open to the seductions of temptation persevere in his state of justice? To accomplish such a blessed work, the grace of God is required, and is sufficient, since grace is necessary alike to the sinner for conversion and to the just for perseverance.

(*a*). It is impossible for the beast of the field to walk without feet or the bird of the air to fly without wings. It is just as impossible for a sinner to be converted to God and to arise from the slough of evil to the state of justice without the assistance of divine grace. Hence the Council of Trent has declared that a man cannot elicit acts of faith, hope and love, and repentance without the preceding inspiration and help of the Holy Ghost. So thoroughly persuaded of the necessity of grace

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was David that he cried: *O God of hosts, convert us.* (Ps. lxxix. 8.) He besought God to convert him, because of himself he was powerless. When a man has had the misfortune to fall into mortal sin, he has contracted a very dangerous weakness of soul, and like the Royal Prophet he may well exclaim: *Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak.* (Ps. vi. 3.) How is he to be delivered from this spiritual weakness? How is he to obtain strength for his wretched soul? Assuredly only by God's grace, and therefore David added to his petition these words: *Heal me, O Lord.* (Ibid.) He sought from God, recovery from his spiritual wounds; he knew that he could not be cured by any natural remedy, that he could not be cleansed from the filth of his sinfulness, nor rescued from the death of his soul save by the justifying grace of God. The Council of Trent accordingly anathematizes the one who would assert that a man can be justified before God by his works without divine grace through Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament we read the details of the celebrated vision of the Prophet Ezechiel. The hand of the Lord led the prophet into a valley which was covered with the bones of the dead, a multitude beyond all count, and the bones were dry, utterly dead, so dead that no voice nor will of man could impart life to them. Even the voice of the prophet had no power until the spirit of life from the four winds, that is, from heaven and the God of heaven, came and breathed upon the slain, not till then did they arise and live: *The Spirit came into them, and they lived.* (Ez. xxxvii. 10.)

Why was it that God wanted the winds to blow over these bones? Oleaster answers: "because the bones were corrupted." This is a picture of the soul in sin. It is not alone infirm, but it is corrupted to its very depths. Hence the penitent David exclaimed in his misery: *My sores are putrified and corrupted.* (Ps. xxxvii. 6.) The grace of God is a radical, far reaching remedy; it alone can destroy the infirm condition of the soul, and re-invigorate and restore it to a healthy and strengthful state in God's sight. Grace is then the sovereign balm for sinful souls.

(*b*). The eye of the body, though sound and perfect, cannot see without the aid of light; neither can man, however justified, live a correct life and persevere for any length of time in justice without the assistance of divinely-given grace. This is the opinion of St. Augustine, and it is confirmed by the words of St. Thomas: "Perseverance," says the latter Doctor, "is a certain continuance in good till the end of life, and to possess such perseverance, a man, established in habitual grace, does not need any other habitual grace, but divine help to direct him and to protect him against the assaults of temptation." The Council of Trent declares expressly the same doctrine. (*Sess.* vi. *Can.* 22.) In the Second Book of Kings we read that Isboseth, the son of Saul, had stationed a servant at the door of his house to keep watch and that this servant fell asleep while her master was taking his rest. The enemies of Isboseth found easy access to his room, and killed him while he slept. The guardian of our house, our immortal

soul, is our will, which, though free in its operations, is nevertheless the handmaid of grace. No matter how good and holy a man may be, if he simply trust to the power of his will, he will certainly fall from justice. He needs special help from God; he must beg of God to guard him against sin by grace, otherwise he will be slain by his enemies in the unexpected time, when he dreams that all is secure and happy for him. The will is weak; it has all the infirmity that is the inheritance of original sin, and is often an unfaithful guardian. *Except the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.* (Ps. cxxvi. 1.)

Again, a good man is subject to the dark influences of passion like other men; he is open to the assaults of the devil and temptation; he is hard-pressed by the ever-recurring occasions of sin, and he, therefore, needs the help of actual grace to keep himself in the state of justice and holiness. Unaided by the light and strength of the Holy Ghost, he will inevitably fall into sin and perdition. Hence the Psalmist has said: *Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell* (Ps. xciii. 17.).

History gives us abundant proof of the lamentable fall of men who were once renowned for their goodness of life and their services to religion. Did not Solomon, the wisest of men, become by sin the most foolish of men? Did not Tertullian who wrote so well and persuasively on the divinity of the Church and the necessity of penance, fall into the toils of the Montanist heresy? Did not Osius who had battled so bravely and continually

for Catholic faith against innumerable heretics, fall at length into heretical depravity? All these men, once glowing with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, found their ruin in their lack of co-operation with the grace offered them by God, and thus we all shall fall, unless we are supported by the all-strengthening hand of heaven without which we can do nothing meritorious of eternal life. Our Blessed Lord has told us this: *Without Me you can do nothing.* (St. John xv. 5.) He does not say that we can do things easier through Him, or do great and laborious things with Him, but He positively declares that we cannot do anything deserving eternal life except through and by Him. St. Paul inculcates the same teaching: *Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.* (2 Cor iii 5.) We cannot say anything, nor do anything pleasing to God without the assistance of divine grace. We cannot say anything, for we read in the Book of Proverbs: *It is the part of the Lord to govern the tongue.* (Prov. x. 23.) We cannot do anything, according to Jeremias: *I know, O Lord, that the way of a man is not his: neither is it in a man to walk, and to direct his steps.* (Jer. x. 23.) Let us then humble ourselves in God's sight and beg Him to grant us grace to work out our salvation. We should all look on ourselves as so many sick persons, confined to bed, weak, so helpless that we cannot move a limb without assistance from others. We need God's help, we are tossed about by the waves of sin and uncertainty; let us cry out with the Apostles: *Lord, save us, we perish.*

The Saviour will come walking to us on the billows, and when all seems dark and desperate, when we are about to sink in the deep of our wretchedness, He will stretch forth His saving hand and rescue us forevermore.

2. As grace is so necessary to all, whether sinners or just men, it will be beneficial to us to look at its operations in us and our correspondence with its salutary workings. A celebrated writer * likens grace seeking entrance into man's soul to the water pressing against the lock in a river or canal. When the lock is shut, the water rises against the gate. It presses with its full weight against the gate until a hand opens the gate of the lock; at once the flood pours in, the level of the water rises, the stream runs along and carries forward those that float on it, almost without effort of their own. The grace of God, the power of the Holy Ghost, is always pressing against our will, always in contact with our heart, moving us onward towards God, impelling us to good. *Behold I stand at the gate and knock; if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.* (*Apoc.* iii. 20) The Holy Spirit of God is waiting at the door all the day long, waiting for our will to co-operate with Him, and when we are willing and open the door, He enters and binding our natural powers to the mighty power of His grace, he elevates our will above itself, strengthens it with supernatural force and carries it onward with facility and speed. And there is no limit to

* Cardinal Manning.

the goodness and generosity of the Holy Spirit. *The Spirit*, says St. John, *breatheth where He will.*

It is the experience of every man who is docile to the inspirations of grace that his co-operation with them has been followed by larger measures of grace. We see this portrayed excellently in the grace of faith. If a man walk steadily in the light of faith, he grows stronger in faith and its light is constantly increasing in him. It is the same with hope; full measures of confidence are poured as abundantly into the trustful soul as was the water into the vessels at the marriage-feast of Cana in Galilee. The plenteous graces of charity have so filled the souls of some saints that the ecstasy and oppression consequent on their action have almost caused the snapping asunder of life's thread. All the graces of Christian life are multiplied, at times surprisingly, as rewards for our correspondence with God's will in our behalf. Is not this a consoling thought? We walk along the paths of duty, and the grace of God lightens our burdens, incites us to holy service, and while others are constantly straying from the way of righteousness, grace prevents us *lest we dash our foot against a stone.*

We cannot overestimate this gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are as children in His hands. The care and solicitude of an earthly parent, however vigilant and constant, is not comparable to the benign direction of the Holy Ghost. The child is like a piece of wax in the hands of its parent. It can be moulded and formed to any character. Whatever the child lacks in the process

of its rearing, the parent endeavors to supply from his own mature store. If the child's will is weak, the parent strengthens it by infusing some of his own determination and fixedness into the child's soul. But there will be no success with the child unless its will be docile and obedient to the parent's direction. The Holy Ghost deals with souls in the same manner. He pours floods of light into them, and if they are susceptible to its illumination, He vouchsafes even more light. He infuses a ray of His own sanctity into them, and if they accept and develop His gift, He leads them along the path of perfection up to the high mountains of God's eternal kingdom. A full co-operation on the part of our souls is indispensable, while the Holy Spirit is acting and directing us to the attainment of salvation.

St. Paul encourages the faithful to such correspondence with grace: *We helping do exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain.* (2 Cor. vi. 1.) Primasius, explaining these words, says: "He receives the grace of God in vain who does not labor with the grace of God." We might well ask ourselves this question: Do we labor with grace? The answer will tell us whether we are toiling here below in vain, or not. This personal questioning leads us to reflect: what a power for weal or woe is placed in our hands? God, the Giver of every best gift, offers us all the means of salvation, and it is a terrible thing to consider that we destroy all hope of salvation by rejecting these means. But it is also some comfort to think that if our will is upright and faithful to

grace, we need not fear all the combined forces of hell, the enemies of our salvation, for *when God is with us, who shall be against us?* Let us then remember that grace and free-will can move mountains of sin and wretchedness; they can change the desolate face of the home of the soul, and install strength, happiness, and comfort there. Let us cry with the Psalmist: *Incline my heart, O Lord* (Ps. cxviii. 36.), to the acceptance of Thy graces, to union with Thy holy will.

It is consoling for poor sinners, who have to contend with the tyranny of bad habits, the manifold temptations of the world and the flesh, and the machinations of the Evil One, to look at the triumphs of grace over hard-hearted, obstinate, and rebellious sinners. There are some hearts which are flexible and tractable, and when the Spirit of God breathes into them, they melt like wax, and are fashioned to any form. There are, however, other hearts which are as hard as adamant, which it is impossible apparently to soften or to sway in any manner. Yet God often conquers these flinty hearts by the power of His grace, and breaks them by the influences of His gifts. *He struck the rock, and the waters gushed forth.* (Ps. lxxvii 20.) God strikes the hard hearts of sinners, and elicits bitter tears of repentance from them. St. Augustine, speaking of his youth and the bad habits he had contracted, says: "I was bound by a chain which I had made for myself. No other man made it. I was bound by the chain of my own iron will." This was manifestly eternal death, for it meant the eternal loss of God. Augustine

had lost all claim on God by his multiplied acts of sin. Yet, in God's good time, grace carried by storm this wicked and hard heart; plentiful tears of repentance flowed, so that he was known as "the man of tears," and the Holy Ghost made a Saint and a Doctor of the Church out of this reckless, degraded sinner. William, Duke of Aquitaine, was deaf to preacher, friend, and conscience, and persisted obstinately in his evil life. The grace of God smote the heart of this wicked man and made the notorious sinner an admirable example of repentance and holiness. The grace of God called St. Matthew from the extortions of the custom-house and converted Saul who was breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. It called him from his mission of blood to the dignity of Apostolic labor. The history of Christianity is replete with examples of the power and efficiency of divine grace. *He turned the rock into pools of water and the stony hills into fountains of water.* (Ps. cxiii. 8.) Grace has triumphed over souls that seemed altogether unworthy of its presence. God has looked on them with an eye of pity, and has closely pressed them. *Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life.* (Ps. xxii. 6.) Men have descended to the lowest depths of sin and infamy, and have appeared to have been entirely lost to God; yet God did not abandon them, and at times has saved them by grace.

If men have been lost, it has never been on account of defect of grace. "The wicked," says the Council of Valence, "are not lost because they could not be good, but rather because they

did not wish to be good." See how grace operated in the soul of Mary Magdalen. According to St. Luke, she "was in the city a sinner"; from her Christ cast out seven devils, as some say, the seven capital sins, and yet God so inspired her with His grace that He Himself said many sins were forgiven her "because she hath loved much." From being the scorn of the Pharisees and an outcast of society, she became a marvellous model of repentance and a most beloved disciple of the Lord. Mary of Egypt was brought to repentance almost in the midst of a life that was shameless and apparently irretrievable. She had actually joined a pilgrimage that was journeying to Jerusalem for the purpose of plying her nefarious profession; but God called her in her sins from her woful state, and by the power of His grace she was saved and became a great saint. Pelagia was another conquest of divine grace. She walked about Antioch in all the splendor of gems and precious garments, attended by a large number of slavish suitors. She seemed to be lost to God. "I am Pelagia," she said of herself, "a sea of iniquity, overflowing with the waves of sin, an abyss of perdition, the snare of souls, the disciple of the devil." The grace of God led her into a church, where the bishop Nonnus was discoursing on sin and its punishment. God spoke to her through this holy man. His grace excited her to repentance and led her to Mount Olivet, where she practised such extreme mortification, and lived so piously and religiously, that she merited to be enrolled in the catalogue of the saints.

These are but a few of the numberless examples of the victory that divine grace has effected over obstinate and hard-hearted sinners. But not to all have been given such mighty graces that conversion would be like a stupendous miracle stirring heaven and earth. Grace is all-powerful, but it avails little if we are unwilling to use it. If we positively reject it, we become like the Jews, to whom the deacon Stephen addressed that bitter reproach: *You always resist the Holy Ghost.* (Acts vii. 51.) Let us pray God to grant us grace, even when we are rebellious against Him, so that we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for the Lord has told us: *Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven.* (St. Matt. vii. 21.)

SERMON V.

PRAYER.

Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. (St. John xvi. 24.)

Prayer is one of the most important duties of our holy religion. If we desire to manifest our love for our bountiful Creator and our gratitude towards our generous Redeemer, we naturally seek all occasions in which we may give expression to our heart-felt sentiments. Prayer is an ever-ready, ever-present occasion, and so great is its power that St. Augustine calls it *the key of heaven.* By prayer the evil spirits are driven away from us; for where God is, the demon cannot be; by prayer, angels come and minister to us as tenderly as they did to the suffering Jesus in Gethsemane; by prayer grace abounds in our souls, and the lamp of God's love lights up our darksome earthly paths. Prayer is the breath of our spiritual life; through it we manifest the faith that is embosomed within us and the necessity we have of heavenly assistance. Prayer is the evidence of supernatural vigor; for we cannot pray except that the Holy Ghost dwells in us, directing our thoughts toward heaven, and prayer is the expression of the faith, hope, and love that are His

blessed gifts. God Himself has prescribed its exercise for us; in fervent prayer we approach His august presence and obtain from Him a plentiful supply of temporal and spiritual good. What a gratifying practice it ought to be for all of us poor way-farers that need so much the solace of heaven to temper our weariness, and the strength of heaven to support us lest we fall by the way-side! Prayer will be a suitable subject to consider in these Lenten days, which form a series of prayers, or one long-continued prayer, and we shall be much encouraged when we know and understand its necessity and power as regards the salvation of our immortal souls.

1. Prayer is most essential for us to live in the state of grace. It is an incontestable truth of our holy faith that we can do nothing, absolutely nothing, deserving of eternal life, of ourselves: *Not that we are sufficient*, says St. Paul, *to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.* (2 Cor. iii. 5.) We cannot accordingly arise by our own strength from the state of sin and recover grace. To do this, we have need of supernatural help, of a twofold grace: an antecedent grace and a concomitant or accompanying grace. The antecedent grace rouses us from our lethargy by enlightening our mind and exciting our will. The concomitant grace upholds us, and this it does when it is really operating in us. The former grace makes us recognize the misery of our condition and induces us to seek for requisite help; the latter grace supplies this help or strength, and makes us em-

ploy it to the best advantage. The antecedent grace God may vouchsafe us without our asking for it: in fact we read in the Book of Isaias: *They have sought Me that before asked not for Me.* (lxv. 1.) The concomitant grace God gives us according to the decrees of His wisdom and providence when we ask humbly for it.

Such is the express teaching of the Church on the subject of grace. We read accordingly in the works of St. Augustine, who has been justly called *the Doctor of grace:* "We believe firmly that nobody can work out his salvation without the invitation of God, that nobody, after he has been invited, can be saved without the help of God, and, finally, that nobody receives this help unless he ask for it in prayer." Observe here the three golden rings that are linked to one another: prayer, co-operating grace and salvation. Does it not follow that, in order to rise from the state of sin, prayer is as necessary to us as co-operating grace? Evidently, for as the sinner cannot draw himself from his misery unless the grace of God arouses and excites him, and as, after hearing that divine voice, he cannot work out his salvation without a particular grace that comes to his assistance, so according to the ordinary dispositions of Providence, he cannot obtain that particular grace without asking for it in prayer. "Nobody receives this help unless he ask for it in prayer." As sinners, we must pour forth our tears and supplications to the Almighty Father for mercy and help. This is the only way that leads to conversion: the only means of exciting the pity of an

offended Deity, the only plank left us after the shipwreck of our souls. Let us address ourselves to God, pray Him to turn towards us and grant us the help that is needful for salvation. *Turn to Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn to you.* (Zach. 1. 3.)

Prayer is also necessary to maintain our souls in the state of grace. Though we may appear to be as solidly fixed in grace as the mountain on the surface of the earth or as a lighthouse in the midst of the boiling sea, we must not forget the Apostle's warning: *He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. x. 12.) We might also reflect with fruit on the words of our Saviour addressed to His apostles: *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak.* (St. Matt. xxvi. 41.) How many violent temptations menace our weakness! How many temptations of corrupt nature and inherent inclination to evil, the sorrowful inheritance of our first father's sin! How many temptations on the part of a wicked world and its seductive attractions! How many temptations proceeding from the scandalous discourse and example of Christians who are animated by worldly sentiments! Yet this is not the sum of all our trouble. St. Paul tells us of enemies even still more formidable: *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.* (Eph. vi. 12.) St. Peter also assures us that *the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Pet. v. 8.) We have

reason to confess our wretchedness, for numerous astute and powerful enemies threaten us incessantly, and endeavor either by open force or hidden artifice to wrest from us the precious pearl of sanctifying grace. How shall we have sufficient strength to resist them?

By prayer and prayer alone. It is prayer which is recommended to us in Holy Writ as the one, indispensable means: *Call upon Me*, says the Lord by the Psalmist, *in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee.* (Ps. xlix. 15.) *Watch ye and pray*, says the Saviour, *that ye enter not into temptation.* (St. Matt. xxvi. 41.) *Take unto you the helmet of salvation*, says St. Paul, *by all prayer and supplication, praying at all times in the spirit.* (Eph. vi. 17-18.) St. John Chrysostom has finely said: "To my mind, it is quite evident that it is impossible to keep ourselves firmly in virtue without the help of prayer." In fact, it follows from the words of this great Father of the Church and a hundred others, that prayer is the only shield which can defend us against the attacks of our enemies, the only means to which we can have recourse to excite divine mercy in our favor, the only key which can open to us the treasures of supernatural grace and the only channel by which heavenly good can flow to us. Let us once for all say that God wills we should ask of Him the grace which we need to do the good that is prescribed by His commandments, to avoid the evil that is forbidden, and to overcome the temptations which hinder us in the doing of good and which urge us to evil. If we do not pray, we cannot expect to receive

this grace, and we shall consequently fall into sin.

What excuse can we give for our neglect of prayer? Will we say to God: Lord, it is impossible to obey your orders, as we have not the requisite strength. No, says St. Augustine, we have no excuse to allege, for if we have not actually the efficacious grace to fulfil the prescriptions of God's law, we have at least the means of applying to God for it. We can always count on this grace, because God will not refuse it. The words of St. Augustine, which have been confirmed by the Council of Trent are: "God commands nothing impossible. He does not demand of us what is not in our power; He urges us to ask for what is above our strength, and He comes to our assistance by helping us to do that which we are unable to do," provided always that we pray to Him. Prayer is also necessary for us to die in the state of grace. To die in God's friendship is without doubt an extraordinary favor of grace, which depends absolutely on the spontaneous and merciful generosity of God. Certainly a good life is the surest preparation for a good death. Nobody, however, can persevere to the end of his life in virtue unless he receive from God the particular gift of final perseverance. That grace cannot be even merited by our good works, no matter how numerous, diverse, and painful they may have been. When we become the friends and children of God by sanctifying grace, we merit by even the least of our works, a fresh increase of grace for the present time and of glory during eternity, but despite this, we never merit the grace of final

perseverance. Such is the opinion of all the theologians in general and of St. Thomas in particular. Now, if such is the case, that is to say, if the gift of final perseverance is not due to our merits, and can be attributed solely to the spontaneous liberality of God, should we not then do all that lies in our power to have this favor granted to us?

Does not God make His generosity depend on the fulfilment of a certain condition? Yes, indeed, and this condition is prayer. Listen again to what St. Augustine has to say: "Some graces, such as the beginning of faith, are given to those who have not even asked for them; others, such as that of final perseverance, are given only to those who asked for them in prayer." It is in this way that God demands, as it were, we should pay for our share in the great work of our salvation. It is but reasonable, and no sane man can find fault with the proviso. Just as when we have committed a sin, we cannot recover sanctifying grace except by making acts of faith, hope and contrition, so we cannot obtain final perseverance in this grace unless we ask for it specially, persistently, and humbly. "After having been justified by grace," such is the conclusion St. Thomas draws from the doctrine of St. Augustine, "man must necessarily ask for the grace of perseverance, so that he may be seconded and sustained till the end of his life. In fact, if grace is given to a large number, perseverance in grace is not always vouchsafed them."

But why pause to quote the opinion of the Church Fathers and the illustrious Doctors? Has not the Saviour taught us the same thing in

very clear terms? What mean the words which He addressed to His disciples when He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and under this image, announced the destruction of the world with all the antecedent signs of the last judgment? His words are: *Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things.* (St. Luke, xxii. 36) What other meaning can these words have but: Pray, pray without ceasing, so that you may persevere amidst the incalculable dangers that surround you and may appear with confidence before the Sovereign Judge?

But inasmuch as the grace of perseverance depends, not on our merits, but on prayer, ought we therefore to lose our confidence? Oh! no. Far from us be all excessive fear, all painful disquiet! Let us ask unceasingly for a good death, and never waver in our hope. Prayer is not less efficacious than our personal confidence, as the fidelity of God to His promises is not less infinite than His justice. Herein the irresistible force of prayer consists, as we shall see in our next consideration.

2. Prayer procures for us all that we ask of God. But a moment ago we said that it possesses an irresistible force. And so it does, for it seems to make the word of man as powerful as the word of God, and in a certain manner even more powerful. It makes man's word as powerful as God's word.

Just as God created the world by His single word: *He commanded and they were created* (Ps., cxlviii. 5.), so man has only to desire and speak and he will forthwith obtain the object of his de-

sire: *I say to you*, says the Saviour, *ask and it shall be given to you; for every one that asketh receiveth.* (St. Luke, xi. 9.). We may say more. Prayer makes the word of man in a certain sense more powerful than the word of God. When God speaks, creatures obey; but when man prays, the Creator Himself obeys. Holy Writ attests this fact: *The Lord obeying the voice of a man* (Jos. x. 14.). God has promised to obey the prayer of man, and prefers to prevent man from praying, rather than not hear him. We find the Lord speaking thus to Moses: *Let Me alone that My wrath may be kindled against them and that I may destroy them* (Exod. xxxii. 10.). This was the occasion. The fearful crime of idolatry which the Israelites committed in adoring the golden calf, at the very moment when God was showering His favors on them, so irritated the Lord that He resolved to exterminate the people even to the last man. But God foresaw that Moses would intervene as a mediator and that He could not reject the latter's prayer. This was the reason why God at first told Moses not to pray for this obstinate people, as He wished to give free rein to His indignation by wiping out the ungrateful Jewish people. *Let Me alone that My wrath may be kindled against them and that I may destroy them.* "Lord," exclaims St. Augustine, "who could prevent Thee? Who is able to hinder Thee? Who can resist Thy will? Why then dost Thou say: *Let Me alone?* Ah! it is because the Lord did not wish to command, but only wished to make us feel the power of prayer." This was evidently the mean-

ing which Moses drew from God's words, and he accordingly insisted on mercy being shown to his prevaricating people. *The Lord*, says Holy Writ, *was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people* (Exod. xxxii. 14.).

After such a well-attested fact, is it not allowable for us to say that prayer is in some sort all-powerful and has an irresistible effect with God Himself? Ought we to be astonished that prayer is all-powerful against the forces of nature and the powers of hell? I would hardly know where to stop if I were to recall the marvels which the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and other men of God wrought by the virtue of prayer, but it suffices to say with St. Augustine: "The prayer of the just man is the key of heaven; it ascends to the throne of God, and makes mercy descend." Whether the object of the just man's prayer is eternal salvation or temporal welfare, the practice of virtue or the flight of sin, victory over passion or progress in perfection, or perseverance in good, it obtains all, for the formal promise of our divine Saviour: *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.* (St. Mark xi. 24.) is universal and does not admit of exception. Infinite liberality of God! Yet St. Augustine is in no wise astonished he considers it as a natural consequence of the favor which the Lord manifests in adopting us as His children. "What is it," says the Saint, "that God will refuse to the prayer of His children, after having adopted them?"

Such also is the reason which Jesus Christ gives,

when He enlightens us on the boundless power of prayer: *The Father Himself loveth you* (St. John xvi. 27.), that is to say: My Father who is your Father also, since through Me He has adopted you for His children, loves you and by reason of this love, He will never refuse you anything, if you ask Him for it. *Amen, amen, I say to you, says the Saviour, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you* (Ibid.).

All that has been already said ought to appear clear and evident, but if we call experience as a witness, what dense darkness it discloses weighing over our hearts? To us it might seem that this formal and general assurance of our Blessed Saviour, as to the efficacy of prayer, is not realized in our lives, for what is more common than the complaints we hear regarding the poor and insufficient results of prayer? May the Lord guard us against giving heed to these criminal and guilty complaints! God can be no more faithless to His promise than He could be to His own existence. If prayer is not heard, says St. James, it is because it has not been properly offered. *You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss.* (St. James iv. 3.) One would think from the incessant complaints made by creatures concerning the results of prayer, that God had changed His whole economy towards mankind. But God is always the same, always rich in mercy to them that invoke Him, and the fault as regards prayer lies with the man who prays. Instead of appeasing God, the sinner provokes Him by his prayers; instead of offering the incense of prayer and causing the dews of heaven's

grace to descend on his soul, the sinner belches forth gross vapors that gather into thunderbolts and storms which the justice of God would instantly hurl on the wretched victim, if mercy did not restrain God's arm. Our prayers are too often Judaical prayers asking for earthly things and uttered without the name of Jesus, and we deserve the same reproach as that given by the Saviour to the apostles: *Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name.* (St. John xvi. 24.) Every time that prayer is offered with the necessary dispositions, it is infallibly sure to obtain its request. Never was prayer ineffectually said, and never shall it be. Yet it must be confessed that oftentimes the effect of our prayers is unknown to us, and it is not till later in our experience that we recognize the delay of God's wisdom in hearkening to us.

St. Augustine explains the mystery to us: "Often God does not hear us according to our desires, in order that He may hear us for our greater good." At times something else which may be the opposite of that for which we ask is more advantageous for our salvation. How does this happen? God, who knows better than we do the value of things and who has more interest in us than we ourselves, does not grant us what we ask, but, instead, gives us what is of more benefit than that for which we petition. He grants us what we would ask for, if we were not limited by our selfish views.

Let us enter into detail. We are constantly pursued by temptations, and we continually pray God to deliver us from them. God, however, sees

that temptation makes us more humble and watchful, and that every victory adds a jewel to the crown of immortality prepared for us in heaven. Therefore He does not deliver us from temptation, but He gives us the necessary strength to resist effectually the incessant assaults of our enemy. Here God consults our spiritual and eternal welfare, and like a good father, He is providing for His children's present and future. Were pride to lay hold of our souls, the work of salvation would be undone, for pride is the mother of evil and a long train of evils. God suffers us to bear the brunt of temptation that we may acquire better the virtue of humility which is the foundation of all the other virtues. Temptation also makes us vigilant. When a man is at peace seemingly with all around him, I mean his spiritual enemies, he is likely to become unguarded and unsuspicious of any approaching harm. It is but the ominous calm before the storm. Our fancied security against thieves and burglars does not prevent them from breaking into our house when they find easy access to it and know that we are not apprehending danger. So it is with the devil; he is ever watching to find the door of our heart open or ajar, and then he will enter taking, perhaps, with him a legion of devils to do all the more readily his nefarious work. When we are tempted, we know our danger and are consequently on our guard against it. We close the door of our heart and fasten it against the demon's approach. When we are thus well fortified, we are for the nonce secure, but must yet carefully watch the Evil one's

movements and tactics. Temptation keeps us ever on the watch to circumvent the insidious attack of the wary prince of evil, and we seem, when in the proper dispositions, thoroughly able to see by the light that God gives, as a result of prayer, the schemes which Satan is devising against us. Were God to grant our petition to be free from temptation, we would be unwatchful and become in all probability the prey of the demon and his ravenous cohorts. In our selfishness, we often do not appreciate God's fatherly kindness and foresight in safeguarding our eternal interests.

Again, it happens that sometimes we are afflicted with a long and painful sickness, and we seem unable to obtain solace or relief by prayer, even most constant and fervent prayer. Sickness, when severe and protracted, is a source of great misery, and it is as terrible and hideous as death itself. It is a hard thing to bear the continued racking of one's body, the acute pain of sense, and the unspeakable languor of spirit that serious sickness inflicts on its victims. Here indeed the flesh wars against the soul. In our pain and lassitude, we ask God for deliverance, for freedom from this cruel martyrdom, for restoration to health and strength; but He does not grant our petition. Yet God, in not according us our heart's desire, studies our spiritual betterment, and directing the course of physical ill to the accomplishment of eternal good, He permits us to suffer for our own benefit. Look at the numerous acts of patience, repentance, conformity to God's will, which we may make in our dark hours of sickness, and which are as infinitely

beneficial to us as they are agreeable to the Lord. God allows us to suffer, and while we are in pain, He grants us abundantly the graces to practise these precious virtues. Yet how we writhe in our affliction, fume at God and man when we find no answer favorable to our prayers! We care not for sickness of soul, but we are quite ready to complain about our physical ills. A pagan philosopher, Epictetus, remarks justly: "We all dread a bodily paralysis, and would make use of every contrivance to avoid it; but none of us is troubled about a paralysis of the soul." God, in His wisdom, makes our bodily afflictions sources of heavenly merit, and we become all the more strongly united to Jesus, inasmuch as in our afflicted state we are like unto Him in His sorrowful Passion and terrible Death. Herein prayer is a most efficacious means of salvation.

Poverty is a very distressing condition of life, and we fret under its privations. We see men about us who are rich in this world's goods and who seem to be attended with all the happiness that earth can afford. It appears, humanly speaking, very natural for us to envy the prosperity of our neighbor and to desire the wealth, pleasure, and convenience which are at his beck. Steel is not sharper than the keenness of man's envy. A fearful passion it is. Through envy Cain murdered his brother Abel. Daily it is the source of excessive crimes and sins. But we all desire what is above our state in life. Pride and envy work together, and their harvest is appallingly abundant. We covet wealth, position and esteem as ardently as

our mother Eve coveted the forbidden fruit. We may seek in prayer liberation from our poverty. There are men in the world who, like the unspiritual Jews of old, tempt heaven by asking only for the goods of this world and self-aggrandizement. God refuses such a prayer, and casts it from Him as a thing of abomination—a despicable and insulting petition. Were God to listen to our prayer, if it had any claim at all on His notice, what might the result be? Riches might be the cause of our spiritual downfall; they might afford us countless opportunities to engage in vice, to prostitute our physical members to sin, and to ruin effectually the prospect of eternal life. Wealth is only too often the road to perdition. When we ambition it with all its dangerous concomitants and ask for it in prayer, we know not for what we pray. Yet no matter what may be our desire and intention, God may not grant our petition, but give us instead spiritual goods to increase the treasure of our soul, which cannot be taken away from us. Are such prayers then unfruitful? No, *God hears them not according to your desires, but for your salvation.*

We appear sometimes to ask in vain, because God wishes to defer for a time the granting of our request, and this He does with the best intentions. He acts toward us in this manner to prove our constancy or to reanimate our faith and the fervor of our desires, or to facilitate the practice of the different virtues which are essentially united to prayer, or to make us appreciate all the better the favor that we have so long and ardently desired,

or to give it to us at a time more propitious for ourselves and more favorable to the glory of His holy name. Who among us would presume to call a prayer unfruitful, whose result is deferred for such wise reasons?

Our prayer is no more unavailing than was the prayer of the sister of Lazarus. When the Lord heard of the mortal illness of His friend and listened to the importunate request of the sister to come and cure him, He remained for three days beyond the Jordan, and did not come till the fourth day to work the stupendous miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, a miracle that should have moved all Israel to acknowledge His divinity. Prayer has always its effect when properly said, and though there may be no immediate result according to our way of computing, it is bound to come when God so decrees and in the manner that He appoints.

We see then the necessity of prayer, on account of the spiritual and corporal dangers to which we are exposed and the great needs to which we are subjected. The weaker we are, the more vehemently we are inclined to temptation, peril, miseries of soul and body, and hence the more fervently we are induced to beg God's help and protection. It is a happy necessity which establishes between ourselves and the best of benefactors an agreeable and advantageous commerce, in which we ask humbly and confidently for what is necessary for spiritual life, and He grants what we ask for, or at least what is beneficial for us. Jesus has assured us of this: *Ask and it will be given you. If you ask the Father anything in My name, He*

will give it you, and yet again: *Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in My name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* (St. John xiv. 13.)

SERMON VI.

FREQUENT CONFESSION.

He that hideth his sins, shall not prosper; but he that shall confess and forsake them, shall obtain mercy. (Prov. xxviii. 13.)

Happiness is the object for which men live and act. If it is absent from life, misery and discontent will abound. The grace of God alone can give us real happiness, and virtue is the crown of grace. No man can be happy who is at enmity with God, for enmity with God means distress and despair of soul, moral and eternal death. Only a demon could live always in such a darksome state, and hence it is that all-sinful as we are, we hunger and thirst after God in our wretched condition; for God is the natural food of our souls, the breath of our life, and our sole satisfying substance. Until Jesus came into the world, mankind knew little of happiness. Sin and idolatry abounded everywhere, but the Saviour, by His holy teachings and example, made this desert of the world the garden of the Lord, and man became as happy as he was at the dawn of creation in Eden. Sin is the cause why men are not happy in this life, and if sin were removed, the world would be a world of supreme felicity and content. We must efface sin from our

souls to be at peace, and sin can be removed only by repentance and pardon. To wipe out sin from man's soul, Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance, by which souls that are dead in sin may recover the life of grace and the happiness which is attendant on that life. No matter how great and enormous sin may be, sacramental confession will efface it; the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ will wash it away. Confession is an agency of God's love for man, and it is the means of our justification in His sight. Sin is a spiritual disease, and confession affords the remedy. Sin is eternal death, and confession confers life. Sin is hatred for God, and confession breathes love. What solid and enduring benefits confession bestows on us! How foolish and imprudent men are who do not grasp and enjoy them!

The Church formally commands her children to confess their sins *at least* once a year. The very wording of her precept implies that we are obliged under certain circumstances to go oftener to the tribunal of penance. It is plain to all that when we are threatened by death or are in great peril that might lead to death, we are bound by all law to seek reconciliation with God by sacramental confession. Soldiers before entering battle, voyagers who purpose a long voyage, women in serious danger in childbirth, and those who are extremely ill, are obliged to confess their sins and obtain pardon for them. When seamen encounter a storm that broods almost certain destruction, they throw overboard their most precious merchandise, to lighten their ship and save their lives. Ought we

not to desire to lay down the oppressive burden of our sins by a sincere confession when the life of our souls is in danger and eternal woe is staring us in the face?

Jonas, a disobedient prophet, deserved a severe lesson from God for falling into a peaceful and deep sleep at a time when every person aboard the ship in which he was sailing thought it would be dashed to pieces by the storm and sunk in the sea. The astonished ship-master said to him: *Why art thou fast asleep? Rise up and call on thy God.* (Jonas i. 6.) The same reproach might be addressed fittingly to many slothful and indifferent Christians who, although exposed daily to the danger of eternal death, defer the duty of confessing their sins and obtaining pardon for them. How can they consistently neglect and risk their eternity? How can they remain thus indifferent to the menaces of approaching ruin? They should arise from their sleep, do penance, and seek reconcilation with their offended Maker. God Himself, by the mouth of the Wise Man, counsels them to do so under pain of terrible reprobation: *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day for His wrath shall come on a sudden and in the time of vengeance, He will destroy thee.* (Ecclus. v. 8, 9.)

1. Let us first look at the necessity of frequent confession. Experience tells us that frequent confession is an absolute necessity for the majority of Christians. When one's house is frequently swept, it is clean; when rarely swept, it is dirty. In the palaces of the great, or homes of well-ordered people, we find few traces of accumulated dirt; but, on

the contrary, every thing in public houses or in the homes of disorderly and negligent housewives is vile and unclean. This is a similitude of sacramental confession. If confession is made properly and frequently, the home of the soul is kept free from the least vestige of sin; if it is made but rarely, the soul becomes defiled with much foulness and grows more unclean day by day.

Just as Naaman, the Syrian general, who was a leper, was ordered by the Prophet Eliseus to wash himself seven times in the waters of the river Jordan, in order that he might be cured, and as Holy Writ tells us, *His flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean*; so he that confesses his sins often is blessed with a clean and pure conscience, as innocent as the soul of a child, exempt from every spot of sin. According to the Fathers, leprosy is a type of sin, and the waters of the Jordan are an emblem of sacramental penance, in which we are bathed in the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, and our sins are washed away. Naaman had to bathe seven times in the Jordan before his cure was effected, that is, as an ancient writer explains, as many times as there are days in the week, to signify that penance is necessary for us at all times.

Confession properly made has the virtue of cleansing the soul from the filth of sin and of preserving it from future sin. The more frequently a man confesses, the more thoroughly he cleanses his soul, and the more precaution he will have not to sully his soul again. This appears to be reasonable. The more frequently one confesses, the

more acts of sorrow he will make the more deeply he will detest his sins, the more firmly he will purpose never to fall into sin again, the more plentifully he will receive the grace of God against relapse, and consequently the more cleanly he will keep his conscience.

He that confesses but rarely, retains his soul in the state of spiritual death or in the danger of it. If a man knows from experience that by deferring his confession, he is likely to fall into grevious sin, he is certainly guilty of serious neglect, and subjects himself to the probability of relapse, which is itself akin to spiritual death.

If a man were to fall into a quagmire and found himself sinking deeper and deeper into it, would he not call loudly for assistance? Now, if somebody, hearing his cries, hastened to extricate him from his frightful condition, and met with such a welcome as this: "I do not want your help; I will wait till I have sunk to my shoulders," what would we think of such rashness and imprudence? Yet there are innumerable foolish persons in this world whose conduct is analogous when it is a question of arising from the slough of sin and saving their souls. They are already deep in the mire of sin, and are descending more deeply on account of their daily repeated sins. It is in vain that they are called to repentance by interior inspirations of grace and external instructive and urgent appeals; they ever remain deaf to all summons, insensible to all voices, and they live hopelessly in the darkness of spiritual death. Has not God just reason to complain of them

and to threaten them with His vengeance: *Because I called and you refused; I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded: you have despised all my counsel and have neglected My reprehensions; I also will laugh in your destruction.* (Prov. i. 24-26.)

To nobody is frequent confession more necessary and salutary than to the sinner who is bound by the iron chain of bad habit, and who is consequently addicted to repeated sin. As an ancient sage of pagan times remarked: "He that begins to own his faults, ceases to sin." Frequent confession made to a prudent director is almost the only means, or at least the surest means, of putting an end to bad, inveterate habits. If the habitual sinner has recourse but once a year to the tribunal of penance, it is a sign that he is not brought there by hatred of sin or love of God whom he has grossly offended, but rather by fear of ecclesiastical censure or human motives. He may not want to be considered an unbeliever, hence he does what others do. There is often a great amount of human respect even in the satisfaction of our moral and religious duties. It is a parasite on all the good that we endeavor to do, and a morbid accident that poisons the merit of our best actions. This is the repetition of the conduct of Judas. He took part in the Last Supper, so that, as he thought, he would not betray his foul treachery. He had not the fervor of the other Apostles, and avarice and treason were gnawing his heart during this solemn scene. Hatred was in his soul when he partook sacrilegiously of the Eucharist, but Christ uncovered his treason while

he was striving to conceal his malicious plot. His insincerity has been a blasting remembrance to all ages. The fatal consequence of refraining from frequent confession is to be seen in the soul's deprivation of grace, the difficulty to make a proper examen of conscience and to preserve the integrity of confession. Sinners thus circumstanced walk directly to eternal ruin. Reason itself will corroborate this view. God in His mercy and love asks one day a privileged soul to open the door that He may come in and behold its condition. But as the soul shows itself to be apathetic and does not hasten to admit Him, He withdraws from it. In the bitterness of its disappointment and helplessness, the soul cries out: *I sought Him, and found Him not: I called, and He did not answer Me.* (Cant. v. 6.) Too late is its sorrow. It is the same with the habitual sinner. God invites him during the year to the blessed work of repentance, but he disregards the invitation, and puts off the avowal of his sins till the time of annual confession. God is insulted, His mercy is abused, and He takes away His grace and supporting arm. What is the consequence? "The sin," says St. Gregory, "which is not wiped out by repentance, draws after it other sins, and this is a chastisement richly deserved." He that does not deplore and correct the evil which he has done, will heap sin on sin.

What a difficulty it is to examine conscience and make suitable confession when this duty is satisfied once in the year. St. John saw in a vision at first the children of Israel, then all the nations

of the earth. As long as he looked at the tribes of Israel, he counted their number exactly; he saw 12,000 Israelites who bore the sign of election on their foreheads. But when he came to count the men of other nations, peoples, and tribes, he avowed that they were innumerable. The year has twelve months: if we were to go to confession monthly, we could keep tally of our sins and confess them properly, but if we allow the sins of a whole year to accumulate on our conscience, we who are accustomed to offend God daily in one way or another will find ourselves nigh incompetent to remember and count our sins. We make our confession a torture and a burdensome task that may have no fruit. In confessing frequently, we avoid both one and the other of these inconveniences.

There was at the time of Christ in Jerusalem a pool, the waters of which cured all kinds of disease; but this occurred only at the moment when an angel descended, moved the waters, and communicated to them the virtue of curing. According to Tertullian, this marvellous event took place but once a year. Yet the fact recorded in the Gospel astonishes you that a sick man lay near the pool for thirty-eight years without being relieved of his malady. Cure was rarely obtained. Ought we not to be astonished when we see sinners lying in the slough of their deplorable state for twenty, thirty years? Ought we not to be even horrified when they pass one year in such a lamentable condition? And what is the cause of their sloth and indifference? It is the irre-

vocable resolution which they have made not to confess but once a year, and as a consequence of such a woful resolution, they do not correct their habits nor reform their lives. When they confess, they do their duty under the force of restraint, and with no idea of beginning a new life. This is why they grow worse daily, why bad habits become so deeply rooted that it is morally impossible to eradicate them; why their will-power is weakened and God's grace lessened; why they hasten speedily toward eternal damnation.

No sadder scene is pictured in the Bible than the tragic death of Absalom and the grief of his devoted father, David. Yet what was the cause of the rebellious son's death? That long and beautiful hair which, to use the words of the Sacred Text, *he polled once a year*. It was so long and thick that it became entangled in an oak-tree, and held him firmly fixed till his enemies ran their lances through his body. "Absalom," says St. Anthony, "is the symbol of the sinner; his hair represents sin and vice; the cutting of the hair represents confession; Joab, the devil; the three lances, bad habits; the hope of a long life, despair." Sinners who confess but once a year may see in Absalom's lot a picture of their future woe. Their sins will become so burdensome that they will be crushed by their weight, and the weight of eternal wrath. We ought to respond to the ardent and repeated invitation of Mother Church to confess frequently the sins that lie heavily on our conscience. We ought to attend especially to this duty whenever we are exposed to the danger of committing mortal sin

through sloth and indifference. Delay in satisfying this obligation may mean the loss of our immortal souls.

2. Having seen the necessity of frequent confession let us now briefly consider two of its greatest benefits. Frequent confession procures for the Christian the happiness of a virtuous life and the happiness of a holy death.

A pure and delicate conscience is one of the greatest joys of earth. He that confesses his sins often has part in this supreme happiness. Just as the face becomes whiter and cleaner if we wash it often, so the conscience becomes purer and more delicate in proportion as we purify if often in confession. St. Thomas of Villanova compares the heart of the man who confesses frequently to a sacred temple and the heart of a man who confesses rarely to a stable. And, in truth, how much foulness and baseness are to be found in the heart of the slothful man who goes but seldom to confession when the great sacramental act is to be done. The heart of a habitual sinner would seem to be one of the fabled Augean stables that it would take a Hercules to clean and purify. The heart of the man who frequents the confessional is a lovely temple whose decorations are chaste and white and into whose sanctuary nothing defiled is allowed to enter. It is adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Ghost which call into activity faith, and hope, and charity. The soul of a man who frequents the Penitential tribunal is like a majestic ship sailing before favoring winds and eventually reaching safe and sound the port of salvation. The

soul of a man who goes rarely to the tribunal is like a dismantled ship which lies motionless in the water. The winds blow upon it in vain; there is no sail spread to catch them; there is no power to impel it. And when at last some impulse is given to this hulk, the labor to make it move is mountainous. Everything depends on labor and toil of the hands. Lacking sail, the dismantled boat must be urged on with oars, and it is such a strain on the powers of nature, that many give up the task as hopeless, and the vessel founders through neglect and sloth, never reaching the port of salvation.

David flattered himself with the hope of being purified and of surpassing the very snow in whiteness: *Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.* (Ps. l. 9.) This great king must have had some good reason for his firm confidence. He had been guilty of two most criminal excesses: the sin of adultery and the sin of murder. Though these were exceeding crimes in God's sight, they were forgiven on account of David's monumental repentance and his resolute determination never to sin again in God's sight. There is no more consoling picture of God's love and mercy toward sinful man than what is portrayed in David's career. It has an encouraging, uplifting effect on poor sinners and teaches them that no matter were their sins as red as scarlet, God will blot them out, if they are contrite and purpose amendment. Seven times David makes his confession of sin in his Fiftieth Psalm: *Blot out my iniquity: Wash me yet more*

from my iniquity: Cleanse me from my sin: I know my iniquity: My sin is always before me; To Thee only have I sinned: I have done evil before Thee. If we wish to be clothed with the robe of purity, whiter even than the snow, we must, like David, confess often our sins to the Lord and to him who has been appointed on earth to take His place. In the New Law this alone insures our happiness. Reason dictates the expediency of such a course. Frequent confession is the means of overcoming vicious habits, which are principally the source of our earthly misery; subdues and tames violent passions, which are the cause of our disquiet and disorder; and triumphs over Satan, who is the principal author of all our woe, temporal and eternal. Satan never dares to tempt vehemently the man who frequents the tribunal of penance.

Birds will leave a tree on which their nests have been destroyed and their young have been captured. The spider will quit the spot where its web has been brushed away by the broom. Likewise, the infernal bird of prey, the venomous spider of hell, will keep far distant from those who have destroyed the nest and the web of sin by frequent confession. They endure but small temptations. The artful demon never suffers so much as when his secret intentions are discovered. He is so proud of his craft and cunning that to unmask him is to pierce his heart and mortify his vanity. He despises man so much, and hates him so heartily, that when man, aided by the grace of the Holy Spirit, relates his infernal schemes and uncovers his wicked plans to the minister of God,

all hell quakes with the effects of his rage and fury. He is like a wicked and persistent lover who does his utmost to restrain the object of his illicit affection from disclosing his infamous conduct to his wife or her parents. Such is a description which St. Ignatius gives of crafty Satan. The demon can do no harm to him who makes known to his confessor all the tempter's inspirations. How is it possible or probable that the Christian who frequents the sacred tribunal should be overcome by the Evil One? He repents often for his past offences, renews often his good resolutions receives often salutary advice from his confessor learns from God's minister necessary and life giving lessons, and is thereby strengthened and fortified in his purpose to lead a good and holy career. All the means conducive to salvation are placed at his disposal. "He that confesses often," says St. Laurence Justinian, "lives in intimate commerce with God, acquires a more perfect knowledge of himself, becomes more apt in the practice of virtue, more vigorous in vanquishing the demon, and more capable to receive new graces from Almighty God." With all these helps in his favor, may we not say with justice that the Christian who confesses frequently leads a virtuous and meritorious life? What an immense benefit this is! It should spur us on to the practice of confessing often, not of simply satisfying ecclesiastical duty once a year. It is a matter of supreme importance to be thus united with the Lord and Master by sacramental bonds, for the whole object, the whole aim of our life on earth should be to

serve God in piety, that we may be happy hereafter with Him.

Let no man among us ask the petulant question: "Why should I confess so often?" He that speaks in this manner gives us to understand that he does not even know himself. Is any man's sanctity so elevated that he does not at times commit a grave fault? Of this he cannot be relieved unless he confess it and do penance for it. Again, is it not beneficial to confess venial sins, into which everybody falls so easily and repeatedly? We must remember that the graces which we receive in the Sacrament of Penance extend undoubtedly to all kinds of sin. Neither let us say, as we sometimes hear thoughtless people saying: "What is the use of confessing so often and falling afterward into sin?" When we soil our hands, we will wash them often, ten and twelve times. If we sin often, let us confess often; if we fall often, let us rise often. We may sin after confession, but we would sin oftener and more grievously, if we did not confess often. We must indeed be blind to our own interests and callous to our desire of happiness, when we do not see the great advantage of frequent confession. In plain language, we despise at least implicity the gifts of a favoring God, and prefer the flesh-pots of Egypt, that bring death to our immortal souls.

Frequent confession gives us the happiness of a holy death. Those who confess often live in piety and virtue, and when they come to that period to which all must come without fail, they

end their days on earth in peace and happiness. The largest part of their lives has been passed in the state of grace and in the practice of the virtues. Faith, hope, charity, contrition, and humility, which is the foundation of all the virtues, have thrown the aureola of holiness about their earthly existence, and they die in the odor of sanctity, assisted by angels and consoled by God.

There is no better preparation for death than purity of conscience. That blessing is chiefly obtained by the graces of frequent confession, for every time that we cleanse our soul, the temple of the Holy Ghost, we add unto its purity, and God is delighted to come and abide in its sanctuary. God lives with us in intimate union, till we pass hence to enjoy His beatific vision. Death is not painful at heart to the Christian who has kept his soul in the living presence of the Holy Ghost; it is but a sigh, an effort of love, that is followed by inexpressible happiness.

What mainly renders death bitter is the recollection of past sin—sin that has not been confessed or not sufficiently expiated. Then there are the violent temptations, the nearness of judgment, and the fear of hell, all of which loom up vividly before the gaze of the dying Christian. But to the man who has confessed his sins frequently during life, no such agitation comes as an unwelcome guest in the solemn dread hour of dissolution. Will he have fear on account of his sins? He has no weight of sin on his conscience; he has often confessed his sins and done satisfaction for them, in so far as he was able. Will

he fear temptation in this dread hour when all hell is arrayed against mortals? He has accustomed himself to fight and overcome temptation. Will he fear the awful judgment that is nigh? He has often judged himself severely during life, and he can now trust to the mercy of Jesus Christ, his Judge. Will he be filled with fear of hell? The Lord has said to comfort just souls: *Do penance, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.* (St. Matt. iii. 21.) He has fulfilled the precept, and he passes triumphantly to his reward. Blessed are they who confess frequently during life, for they will die comforted and happy. If we are desirous to obtain eternal life, we must use the means leading to it. Frequent confession is the principal of these means. We stand on the threshold of God's holy temple and look into the beauty, richness, and happiness there. Oh, how eagerly our hearts desiderate the good things of the living God! But we must not enter there except we are clean and pure. Again and again we must purify ourselves in the waters of penance, and when every spot has been washed away, then we may enter, to be loved, caressed, and made happy by God and His angels.

SERMON VII.

FREQUENT COMMUNION.

And they were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts ii. 42.)

These words recall to our minds the primitive Christians, the fathers of our holy faith, who were the first favored objects of God's love, the witnesses of His religion, and the saints of earth and heaven. They lived sanctified and innocent lives amidst the persecution of Jew and Roman; they shone as stars of spotless integrity in the heart and centre of imperial splendor, in the midst of Greek sentimentality and Oriental luxury. What was the power that separated them as an elect people from their pagan and Jewish surroundings and kept them bound together in a unity of brotherhood and faith? It was undoubtedly, as our text intimates to us, their firm adhesion to apostolic teachings, their union of prayer, and above and before all, their daily participation in the Eucharistic banquet. Their daily communion was their mainstay in affliction, their virtue before the community, and their life and substance in the face of torture and death. With the fortitude and courage which they acquired from their daily communion, they feared

no threat nor cruelty of worldly power. They were as immovable in their faith as the rock amidst the ocean waste; they were invincible and fearless of torture and death. To what a brutal system of violence they were subjected for being followers of the crucified Nazarene? Their flesh was torn by scourges and their nerves bared to the gaze of inhuman spectators; they were beheaded and thrown to wild beasts to be devoured; they were crucified like their Divine Master, and cast headlong into the sea; they were roasted alive and deprived of their bodily members; it would be impossible to relate the list of the ingenious tortures and punishments devised by their persecutors to make them abjure the faith of Christ—but hate and cruelty were all of no avail to subdue their loyal and generous hearts. Paganism, in its ten incessant persecutions, through the long lapse of three hundred years, lost in the battle, and as St. Perpetua said in her prison on the eve of her martyrdom: *Illuxit dies victoriæ*—The day of victory dawned for the Church. If this is a history of blood and death, it is also a history of heroism and unsurpassed splendor. The cradle of Christian faith was rocked in the blood of its martyrs. What supported these heroes, these witnesses of Christ's religion, and prevented the gates of hell from prevailing against the infant Church? It was the marvellous, supernatural, heaven-born power and strength which the primitive Christians drank in from the sacrament of God's love. Upheld by this heavenly vigor, young, tender souls were made invincible; old men, brave; delicate

virgins and gentle matrons were nerved to die for Christ and heaven. No such sacrifice or generosity of soul had ever been pictured before in the history of the human race. This same sacrament still abides for us, and though we are not called to suffer for our faith, as did the early Christians, we are, nevertheless, forced to battle against the devil, the flesh, and the world, and need the strength and courage which made the saints of primitive times triumphant over cruel persecution and terrible death. Whether we listen to the words of our Blessed Saviour or look at our own feeble condition, frequent communion is a necessity which we cannot justly disregard.

1. To prove to us it is Our Lord's will, that we should approach the Holy Table frequently, it is sufficient to recall His own express wish as recorded in the Gospel: *With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.* (St. Luke xxii. 15.) These were the affectionate words which the Saviour addressed to His Apostles on the night before He began His sorrowful Passion. Gethsemane lay before Him with its frightful sweat of blood, and Calvary loomed up before Him with its terrible, ignominious death; but with every feeling of sorrow and pain that rent His sensitive nature, there coursed the feeling of His undying love for man. And with this same love He instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist as the perpetual pledge of His tenderness and affection for sinful man. Does He not reside in our midst? Does He not perpetuate His sacrament? And has He not at all times since His coming prepared His

heavenly banquet for us, that nothing may be found wanting when we sit down to it, and that we may not die of hunger in a homeless world? Therefore, in His mercy, He deputes His servants to say to us: *Come, now, all things are ready*; and to His disciples He gives the command: *Compel them to enter in.* Would He have used such extreme language, if He did not wish to see us at His Holy Table? Would He have instituted this banquet under the species of bread, if He had not wished to give us food? Without bread, our material life is in danger. How can our spiritual life be supported without the Bread of Angels? We have a fondness for bread because it is the staff of life, and we eat it several times, each day. Yet is not the Eucharist the daily bread of our souls, for which we pray so often in the Lord's prayer: *Give us this day our daily bread?*

Let us not then delay; Jesus expects us and waits for us. *Come to Me*, He says *and I will refresh you. Take ye this and eat: This is My body. Do this in commemoration of Me.* (St. Matt. xxvi. 26.-St. Luke xxii. 19.) *As often*, says St. Paul, *as you shall eat this bread — you shall show the death of the Lord, until He come.* (1 Cor. xi. 26.) How can we answer properly the appeal of the Saviour, if we do not communicate frequently, if we do not take Him often into our souls as nourishment? Do not say: "We are obliged to go to communion but once a year." This precept is violated in its essential spirit by such an objection, as it was made principally for slothful, indolent, and indifferent Christians. It does not forbid, but on the contrary implies that the faithful should

go often to communion during the year. When we know our Lord's will and the joy that comes from obeying it, will we still refuse to respond to His wishes and deny Him the satisfaction which He expects from us? Without doubt, Jesus has not prescribed how often in the year we should approach His holy Table; but since He invites us so urgently, and it is His delight to be with us, to be united to us, as His own words testify: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him*, shall we hesitate, if we have any faith, to make some effort to receive Him often in the sacrament of His love? Alas! how many Christians there are in our days, who attach no importance to this truth? They are satisfied with making their Easter duty, as they call it, and with approaching the Holy Table but seldom. When we remember the early ages of the Church and our forefathers in the faith, how ashamed we ought to be of our laxity and indifference? Look back to the days of the Apostles and disciples, of the first converts and followers of the Lord, and we see crowds of fervent Christians gathered in the cenacle, as our text intimates, for *the breaking of bread*. How often the Holy Supper was celebrated in those dark days with overwhelming love and unbounded religious enthusiasm! These staunch Christians knew not what the morrow would bring them, for death stared them hourly in the face; but what cared they for death when Jesus was their companion and resided in their hearts. It was only the happy passage to the land of eternal joy, to the embrace of the heavenly spouse. Look at the faith-

ful down in the bowels of the earth, the catacombs, whither pagan persecution had driven them. When the soldiers discovered their retreat and hiding-place, hundreds, aye, thousands of them were dragged from their subterranean homes and butchered to make a Roman holiday. "The Christians to the lions!" was the cry of the populace, whenever there was a lack of diversion in the imperial city. The Eucharist was the life and strength of these fervent souls that were hounded and outlawed by Roman authority, and it gave old and young a more than earthly power to face tortures, savage beasts, fire and death in every conceivable form. With Jesus living daily in their souls, they died amidst the chanting of heaven's choirs and in the embrace of their Lord and God. How supremely happy was their death! Death brought no terror to them, and their love of God conquered the pain and atrocity that surrounded their dissolution. Was it a wonder that St. Lawrence should request the impious tyrant to turn over his half-burned body on the gridiron that was accomplishing his terrible end? These heroic martyrs could not, it would seem, suffer too much for Him who had suffered so much for them. The daily Bread from heaven was their food and life, and Jesus was the term of their love. Listen to the Fathers of the Church, from the days of St. Augustine down to those of the twin Doctors of the faith, SS. Thomas and Bonaventure, and we hear them felicitating the pious Christians who communicate frequently, and recommending all to eat the heavenly Bread. The Councils of the Church,

directed by the Holy Ghost, have both inculcated and commanded the same observance. The Council of Trent, which gathered the teachings of all previous ages, declared that frequent communion was a duty incumbent on Christian souls, the proof of their love for Jesus Christ, and the most efficacious means of attaining to eternal life. The holy Council advises the faithful with paternal love, entreats and conjures them through the mercy of God to honor the sacred mysteries of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ by eating frequently of the Bread of heaven.

When we know and appreciate the express desire of our Blessed Lord, also His very words, and the example of the Church, the interpreter of her saintly Founder, shall we not arise from our apathy and seek frequent union with Christ in His adorable Sacrament of peace and love? Shall we not do ourselves holy violence and compel ourselves to enter in and partake of the Supper which He has prepared for us? Jesus, our Lord and King, our Master and Redeemer, hath proclaimed that all without distinction are invited to sup with Him; His heralds have announced it to the world for full 1900 years, and His good and true liegemen all hasten to gladden their Lord's heart. Woe unto them that hearken not to His urgent call! For the Lord has said to those who were invited and refused to come: *None of these men that were invited shall taste of My supper.* (Luke xiv. 24.) The result of their refusal to be His guests may mean their eternal reprobation; they shall be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What is really the conduct of those who content themselves with one communion during the year? It is, to say the least, inconsistent with their Christian character. They seem to have lost the love of Jesus Christ. If they had genuine love for Him, would they not seek Him, would they not gladly respond to His pressing invitation? Would they not be profoundly moved by His words: *Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.* (Cant. v. 1.) How do they act who are seldom seen at the Holy Table when they have ample time to prepare, and to come and rehabilitate their strength with this heavenly food? They assist at Mass frequently and see thousands, perhaps, approaching Holy Communion in the course of a year, while they of their own accord remain estranged from the Source of life. These are tepid, lukewarm Christians who have lost taste for this spiritual food; worldly and indifferent men who do not *relish the things that are of God, but the things that are of men*; who are neither hot nor cold, and whom God in His disgust vomits forth into reprobation and eternal abandonment. There are many who gather at the Lord's festive board at frequent intervals and partake of the delicious viands set for all. They are always Christ's most welcome guests, they are His crown and ornament. But there are numberless others who offer every species of excuse for neglecting this all-important duty, and who try to impose on God by vain and foolish pretexts. They allege that worthy and faithful Christians go too often to the Holy Table. They would place their unspirit-

ual judgment above the will of Christ. While Jesus awaits us day after day in His loving Sacrament, how can they think it extravagant if affectionate children should approach Him once in the week! The early Christians communicated daily, and it is the most ardent wish of the Church that we were worthy to imitate their holy example. Again some say captiously that they who go so often to communion have faults, and glaring faults. Without doubt, but these faults come from the man, not from the Holy Table. Let such critics be honest, and they must confess that it is not among those who receive Communion often that are to be found the prevailing vices, scandals, and crimes. These religious persons are not disobedient, unbelieving or immoral. They may be feeble like their neighbors, but we must remember that sanctity is only acquired after great effort and great perseverance.

Will a man have fear that he shall lose respect for Jesus Christ by frequent Communion or acquire from it the meaningless habit of routine? But tell me, is not the avoidance of a person's presence or company an evidence of ill-will or contempt? Is not a frequent visit a sign of esteem and affection? What can one fear from the systematic work of routine? Has any one such a fear when it is a matter of worldly duty? Is a man afraid to contract habits of gaming, drinking or lewdness? Does the soldier fear to lose his respect for his calling because he is exact in the performance of his duties? Does the politician fear to lose his hold on his constituents, because he does that

very same thing over and over which keeps him in touch with them? Does the statesman fear to value less his high office, because he is as punctual as the sun in the performance of the obligations of his trust and as regular as the clock in attending to the details of his important business? Routine does not lessen the pride which one has in his profession, business or work. Should a man then delude himself that the only habit he has to fear is the habit of going frequently to receive his Lord and Master? If this excuse were of any weight, then we might also give up saying our morning and evening prayer, or assisting often at Mass. That common expression, *I haven't time*, is another excuse often given for not approaching frequently to Holy Communion. This excuse is but little short of downright falsehood. Is it too much to set aside of all the hours in a month a few to attend to a duty that is the highest and most important of all our duties? During the course of a month, how many hours we devote to vanity, pleasure and nonsense! Yet who can give us greater enjoyment, or who has more power to prosper our business than Jesus who is the fountain of joy and the Master of the world? Every time that we go to Holy Communion we take away a heavenly blessing that not only sanctifies us, but brings peace to our homes and success to our worldly affairs. Jesus is indeed the source of our life and our happiness.

2. Another motive that should induce us to approach the Holy Table frequently, is the knowledge of our own indigence. When some men are

asked why they do not receive Holy Communion often, they answer that they are withheld from this duty, which is so consistent with their Christian character, by the sense of their feebleness, the supremacy of their passions and the incessant troubles of temptation, all of which render them unfit to perform this august sacramental act. In all these objections, which are mainly suggested by the devil, we fail to see a single reason which could dispense a man from receiving Communion often. On the contrary, these considerations ought to urge us to the frequent reception of the Lord's Sacrament. Doubtless, we are all unworthy to receive the heavenly Bread, and when the priest offers it to us, he reminds us of this fact: *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof.* But are we to conclude from our unworthiness that we should abstain from partaking of the Body of the Lord? This is a serious and dangerous mistake. We are unworthy to address God, and because we are so, ought we neglect and omit prayer? As we shall never be worthy to receive Holy Communion, we must, to be consistent with ourselves, never receive it. If we are unworthy to communicate, we are bound by all law to make ourselves as worthy as we can. This very confession of our unworthiness is in itself an act of humility. Despite our baseness and sin, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man to testify His love for us. Daily this God-man renews the prodigy of His love in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Notwithstanding our unworthiness, ought we not to go and meet Him?

Ought we not to partake of Him often, very often? Will we become more worthy by keeping away from Him? Will we grow warmer by remaining away from the fire? Do we not see that those who receive Communion frequently are blessed with more virtue than those who abstain from it for a long time or who receive it only once in the year in Paschal time? Our personal unworthiness should be a potent motive to induce us to prepare ourselves all the better for the reception of the Eucharistic Bread with firm confidence in Christ's mercy.

Men of the world, beyond count, will persist in saying: *We are so weak.* Yes, this is true. Who does not know the weakness of the human heart? Oftentimes we think that we have made the strongest resolutions, and almost immediately our weakness is apparent. What conclusion are we to draw? Must we neglect to receive Holy Communion because we are weak? We do not reason in this way when we are weak and sick in body. When we are sick, we seek for some remedy, we call in the physician. When we are weak and sick at heart, should we not adopt the same treatment? It is precisely because I am weak that I must seek the means to strengthen myself. And what means more powerful can we find than the Holy Communion? When we are fatigued and exhausted, we obtain new strength by taking solid and substantial nourishment. What do we receive in the Holy Eucharist? Is it not God Himself as food? And if physical strength is imparted to us by natural sustenance, what efficacy will not this

Bread that is God Himself have in restoring health and strength to our wearied hearts? When a young tree stands alone, without any support, it is at the mercy of the wind, it can give no resistance, on account of its fragility and it is likely to be uprooted. But if we give strong and solid props to the tree it will brave the fury of the storm. Just so, if we fear that our virtue will be overthrown by the storm-winds of passion and temptation, what confidence do we not have in our reception of the Holy Communion wherein we partake of God who is the source of strength, divine strength itself? Has He not said: *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in Him?* As he who has life cannot die, so we cannot complain of our weakness when Jesus Christ, the God of power, resides in our souls. And when we have received Him into our bosoms, we may well say with the Apostle: *If God be for us, who is against us?* (Rom. viii. 31.)

Men will also allege as an excuse for not receiving Communion often that they are subjected to the power of strong passions. There is no doubt that passion exerts a terrible and perilous influence on the lives of men. We feel the vehement action of passion every day and hour that we live. Our hearts are like a battle-field on which love and hatred contend for supremacy, and fierce contests are being constantly waged. The flesh is rebellious, the senses are disobedient, the passions rise in the soul and ferment a strong and dangerous concupiscence which threatens to poison our whole being. Will we conclude that

on account of our passions, we must abstain from frequent Communion? Certainly, such reasoning is invalid. When our body is subjected to violent attacks of fever, we make use of some cooling remedy. Why should we not have recourse to the same means when our souls burn in the fever of passion? Why do we not employ remedies that will extinguish the heat and calm the violence of our passions? Is there a more efficacious remedy than Jesus who is the God of peace, the Master of the winds and waters, whom we receive in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar? When we partake of the Eucharistic Bread with contrite and well-disposed hearts, God infuses into us a new life totally different from the life of *the old man* which permits concupiscence to lead us astray and to make sport of our immortal souls. Jesus has told us: *As I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.* (St. John vi. 58.) St. Bernard likewise speaks encouragingly to us: "Since the Holy Eucharist is so vivifying and efficacious, it arouses us from the deep sleep in which we are plunged, penetrates the hardness of our hearts, uproots bad habits, destroys evil inclinations and replaces them with the contrary virtues.' St. Cyril adds his valuable testimony: "This Sacrament destroys concupiscence, re-animates piety, and causes the disorders of the heart to disappear."

If the saints bore the most cruel punishments with patience, overcame the sensibility of nature, endured contempt, and humbled their pride; if we ourselves are not now so frequently and vio-

lently transported with anger, cast down by discouragement, sullied by uncleanness, all these happy results must be attributed to the graces of the Holy Eucharist. Yes, it is a sacrament which has manifested its power and efficacy in ourselves. When Jesus dwells in our hearts, He subdues our enemies, and drives away from us the prince of darkness.

Finally, men complain of their temptations, of their external enemies, their fellow-men, the world and the demon. But it is precisely because we have to meet and contend with these hostile elements that we ought to go often to Holy Communion. We ought to partake of the *Bread of the strong* all the more frequently and all the more fervently when the assaults of the devil are violent and temptation is stubborn and persistent. If we take all the necessary precaution to fortify our house against thieves and burglars, ought we not for a greater reason seek protection against the enemies of our souls? Where shall we find this protection except in the Holy Communion? Jesus Christ, whom we receive, has not only conquered the world, but also the prince of the world. When did these enemies wage a more bloody war than at the beginning of Christianity? The pagans, philosophers, and infernal spirits were banded together to destroy the Church. But they could not realize their unhallowed design. The blood of the martyrs was the seed which germinated Christians all the more numerous, as they were all the more massacred. In those days of faith, children and tender virgins were to be seen laughing to

scorn the most cruel sufferings and the most hideous punishments. Whence came their courage in their combats and their victory over the greatest power that ruled the world? At that period in the history of the Church, the *breaking of bread* was a daily solemnity, and the faithful fortified themselves with the Eucharistic Bread as a preparation for their combat. They left the table of the Lord with the courage of lions and spread terror in the ranks of their enemies. They laid the foundation of our peace and civilization.

Christians, you who complain of the numerous dangers that surround you and the numerous snares which your enemies in these unhappy days have set for you, you must, if you wish to escape safe and sound, you must employ the same means as your predecessors in the faith employed. Do not allege unworthiness as a motive. Since you know your own weakness, the violence of your own passions, the attacks of your enemies, you ought to have recourse to new means of defence. As the cause is found in yourselves, ought you not eat frequently of the Bread which strengthens the weak, lessens the heat and force of the passions and triumphs over all external enemies? Is it then enough to receive Holy Communion once or twice in the year? Certainly not. In acting thus, is it not to augment your weakness, to strengthen your passions and to make your enemies more formidable and invincible? Is it not likely that you will fall into the snares and occasions of sin? Since your enemies surround you and force your corrupt inclinations to run riot, you should ever watch

and pray, and above all fortify your souls with a frequent reception of the Bread from heaven. Jesus will abide in you and you in Him, and you shall be not only worthy to receive Him often in the Holy Eucharist, but also to see Him face to face during a happy eternity.

SERMON VIII.

RELAPSE INTO SIN.

You were as sheep going astray, but you are now converted to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Peter ii. 25.)

Such is the difference which the Apostle St. Peter places between the state that preceded our conversion and that which followed it. Before our conversion to God, we were separated from the fold of Jesus Christ, like stray sheep, exposed to the fury of infernal wolves, whose prey we would soon have become, if the Good Shepherd, touched by our wanderings, did not go Himself and bring us back to His fold. But now, at the present hour when we bring to a close our holy Lenten exercises, since we have entered the fold again and are faithful to the voice of the Good Shepherd, we are once more secure under His protection, and we may hope that He will defend us with His staff and lead us to happy and fertile pastures. *You were as sheep going astray.* Let us apply this thought to ourselves. In the state of sin, we were the slaves of the devil. That spirit of darkness exercised despotic sway over us and would, if he were permitted, have chained us to the prison of eternal death, but since our resurrection to grace, we have passed under

the dominion of Jesus Christ, who has promised us, if we are loyal to Him, happiness supreme, unspeakable and everlasting. Ah! is it possible that we could ever again resolve to abandon so good a Master, in order to join the forces of His enemy, and thus become hated of God and His angels? This good Shepherd has done so much to keep us within the confines of His fold; He has even suffered death, as says the Gospel, to give us life. Shall we then render His sacrifices useless, His death without fruit? We have been healed, as the divine Saviour said to the paralytic who had lain near the pool for thirty-eight long years: *Behold thou art made whole.* (St. John v. 14.) Let us guard against relapsing into sin, for fear that something worse may happen to us: *Sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.* (Ibid.) Let us now at the close of our spiritual exercises consider seriously what a great iniquity it is to fall again into sin, and what are the sad effects of such relapse.

1. Every mortal sin is a great prevarication, as it is a crying outrage on the infinite wisdom, goodness and majesty of God; but when, after we have repented of it at the prescribed penitential tribunal, we commit it again, the outrage becomes an enormous crime, an atrocious deed. "As regards the maladies of the body," an ancient writer says, "relapse after cure is more dangerous than the first sickness," and St. Bernard adds, "it is the same with relapse into sin." St. John Chrysostom also says that sin becomes more grievous when we commit it anew, after having received the pardon of God's mercy for it. "It

is already of itself a very great fault," says the golden-mouthed Saint, "when a man, instructed in the truths of faith, knowing the goodness of God, the joy of heaven, and the pains of hell, dares to commit mortal sin, but to receive forgiveness for it and commit it again, is a veritable crime." When the Saviour met in the temple the paralytic whom he had cured a short while before, He recalled to him the marvellous favor granted to him, and said these remarkable words to him: *Behold thou art made whole; sin no more.* (St. John v. 14.) The same important command He gives to every one of us who has received for the first time forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. It is as if our Blessed Lord were to say to each one: "My child, recognize the grace of My love and mercy; I have cured you of all your infirmities by washing them away in My Precious Blood; I have purified your tongue sullied by calumny, outrage, and blasphemy; *sin no more.* I have cleansed your sight from unclean looks; I have washed your hands from the infection of injustice; *Sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.* If you fall again, if you repay with ingratitude the favor that I have granted you, then this new sin will make you a thousand times more guilty in My sight and hereafter unworthy of My mercy."

There is, in truth, connected with every mortal sin such outrageous, crying iniquity that we are astonished God does not exterminate the sinner at the very moment when he commits it. *The mercies of the Lord*, says the prophet Jeremias, *that we are not consumed.* (Lam. iii. 22.) "If the ice,

hardened by my crimes," says St. Augustine, "melted at last, it is to Thy all-powerful grace and Thy infinite mercy, I owe it, O my God!" (Confessions). If the justification of a sinner is a work which demands infinite mercy and power; if the forgiveness received delivers the sinner from the terrible penalty of eternal damnation, is it not a monstrous ingratitude to despise this immense favor and to revolt by the commission of sin against the majesty of the divine Benefactor? To understand still better the value of the favor which the Saviour bestows on the sinner in vouchsafing him His love, we must remember that the sinner is an object of abomination in His sight, unworthy His consideration and mercy; yet God in His goodness looks tenderly upon him, gives him the light of His grace, encourages him, and does not move away from him until He has brought him to repentance. Neither is this the sum of His love and solicitude. After this, God remits his sin and the eternal chastisement due it; He diffuses into that rebellious soul His sanctifying grace, re-adopts this ungrateful child, grants to this faithless subject all the clemency of His paternal affection and loads him down with the abundance of graces and benefits. What a miracle of mercy! But what a display of ingratitude to forget invaluable favors, to wrest one's self, as it were, from the arms of God, to insult Him anew, to return to the slavery of sin! Is not this the last degree of perversity? A being out of the lowest depths of humanity insults by a wicked blow a powerful sovereign; instead of punishing

this foul deed, as it deserved to be punished, the king pardons the guilty wretch, takes him to his embrace, and treats him with munificence. If that insolent subject, after being pardoned, dared to repeat his outrage, would not his conduct be an unpardonable crime in our eyes? Judging it to be such, we would be only speaking the truth. But what, O God, are all the kings of earth when compared to Thee! What are all the injuries, all the outrages that men could commit, when compared to the vile and abominable ingratitude which he manifests against Thy infinite bounty who falls again into mortal sin?

On this point, let us listen to Tertullian: "A sinner who falls again into the fault for which he received forgiveness, prefers the devil to God; for God, according to the holy Gospel, establishes His abode by grace in the soul of the repentant sinner; when the latter is disposed to commit sin, he seems to hesitate between God and the devil; in determining his action, he decides that the devil whose cause he espouses by sin is the better of the two masters." The sin of relapse appears so great to this Doctor of the Church that he regards it as a retractation of past repentance, as if the sinner expressed his regret to Satan that he had ever been converted to God. It is a terrible thing to ponder, but it happens, in a certain sense, every time that a sinner returns to evil after his conversion. Can any body paint in suitable colors the abominable malice of the sin of relapse? And ought we not to employ all our zeal not to fall again, when, after having had the misfortune to

commit sin, we have found grace in God's mercy? But let it be said for the consolation of all, that relapse does not always possess the character of perversity ; it may proceed from weakness, being sometimes the effect of surprise, although in other circumstances, it is the consequence of culpable negligence or even the effect of malice. To the latter all that we have said applies particularly. If we have fallen again into sin through the effect of an unforeseen circumstance, we can regard this misfortune as proceeding from our frailty, at least if we have been eager to arise from it and turn to God in prayer and repentance. This relapse will also convince us more and more of our feebleness, inspire us with distrust of ourselves, and urge us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. But if we fall frequently into the same sin on account of our neglect to fly from the occasions of it, that is malice pure and simple, a culpable forgetfulness of our duty. Our souls are thereby cast into a dark and wretched state. Listen to the thought with which this sad state inspired the learned Tertullian: "The tears of a whole lifetime would not suffice to weep for one mortal sin; it deserves to be deplored by eternal tears; and yet, you sinner, instead of weeping bitterly for your past faults, you add to them by new crimes."

Poor, wretched and abandoned mortals that we are! How many as weak, and even more exposed to evil than we, have not fallen a second time into iniquity! Why cannot we imitate them courageously? The loss of life is nothing in comparison to the loss of divine grace, and yet to lose that

precious pearl, that supreme good, is, sad to say, nothing in our eyes. Let us arise from our indifference and reflect on the folly of our conduct. Woe to us, if we do not guard against sin and especially relapse into sin.

2. What sorrowful effects relapse into sin produces? The second revolt against God exposes us to greater danger of eternal damnation than the first sin, and the seriousness of this danger ought to inspire us with extreme care and vigilance. This is a truth as certain as consoling: God never closes the door of His clemency on the sinner, no matter how overwhelmed he may be with iniquity, provided that he wishes to be sincerely converted. God embraces all sinners in the same mercy; He offers all of them, without exception, grace and pardon. "He who commands us," says St. Antony, "to pardon our brother seventy and seven times will assuredly forgive a greater number of times the man who will enter into himself." We are called by God to repentance and are received into His grace with much kindness, when we present ourselves before Him with contrite and humble hearts. Therefore, we ought not abuse His infinite bounty by committing rashly new sins, for then, says St. John Chrysostom, we expose ourselves to the evident danger of perishing eternally. The affrighting words of Holy Writ, better than anything else, make us understand the seriousness of our danger: *It is impossible*, that is to say, difficult and extremely rare, the Apostle tells us, *for those who were once illuminated . . . to be renewed again to penance* (Heb. vi. 4-6). If in this

state it is difficult, and so to speak, impossible to come to repentance; forgiveness and justice will not be obtained more easily, for pardon supposes repentance. To confirm the truth of these words, St. Paul says that there is no longer a victim to appease God and obtain reconciliation for those who arise from sin only to fall into it again: *If we sin wilfully, after having the knowledge of truth, there is now left no sacrifice for sin.* (Heb. x. 26.) The Doctor of the Nations speaks, in truth, of those who, after receiving the priceless favor of faith and baptism, abandon Jesus Christ by an act of apostasy: but relapse into sin after forgiveness is also a sort of apostasy, and the words of the Apostle have their full meaning here, since Christians, whose cradle has been illuminated by the faith of Jesus Christ, are even more inexcusable when they fall again into sin. In this condition there is evidently danger of damnation, for God abandons the wretched pervert.

What again proves this terrible chastisement is, according to the Gospel, the dominion which the devil exercises over these perjured creatures. This power becomes more and more tyrannical as time goes on, and it surrounds its victims so completely that escape is not easy from it. Jesus speaking of this power says: *Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is made worse than the first.* (St. Matt. xii. 45.) The devil treats his victim as the jailer does his prisoner; he rivets his chains strongly, watches him day and night, and

closes every avenue of escape against him. *He taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself.* What can that man, loaded down with chains, weak and powerless expect but eternal reprobation? His wavering in the way of salvation makes him unfit for the kingdom of God. The divine oracle is accomplished in him: *Him that passeth over from justice to sin, God hath prepared for the sword* (Ecclus. xxvi. 27.), or as the Psalmist says: *The enemies of the Lord have lied to him and their time shall be forever.* (Ps. lxxx. 16.) They lied because they gave themselves again to sin, which in the hour of repentance they deplored and detested in God's sight. This is why eternal chastisement awaits them. In their iniquity, says David, sinners have turned on every side; they have gone from sin to repentance, and from repentance they have returned to sin; but a terrible retribution is before them: *God shall break the heads of His enemies; the hairy crown of them that walk on in their sins.* (Ps. lxvii. 22.) Woful is the end of the perjured wretch; Judas was and ever shall be, an object of abomination to all that love the Lord, a monument of black ingratitude to the circling ages, but his sin of treason was committed only once, while we fall again and again into repeated, open acts of treachery and ingratitude. What fate can we expect? Will it be less than the dark retribution that overtook the seller of his Lord and Master.

The justice of God reaches sinners even in this life, and while they wallow in the filth of their repeated iniquity, they feel heavily the weight of

divine vengeance. They acquire until the very end of existence, a deplorable constancy, a lamentable readiness in crime. Before, says the prophet, they veered from one side to another, but at length God's justice, wearied with continued insult, overtakes them, and they become, like rotten hulks in the water, motionless, stuck in the mud of perversity, to all intents and purposes dead, and they do not even desire salvation. The statement is not overdrawn. I appeal to your own experience. How many thousands are living in our midst as if they had no souls. They have a quick perception of what concerns their bodies, they are keenly alive to pains and ailments, they are conscious of what will bring them material happiness and comfort, they know when they are suffering, but as regards their souls, they may be spiritual lepers and yet have no perception of their wretched condition. They live worldly, sensual lives and they have become so unconcerned about sin, that they have grown to have no more feeling of the soul that is within them than they have of the circulation of their blood. The greater part of mankind outside of Christ's fold are of such character; they do not appreciate that they have souls at stake, that these may be lost or saved eternally and they live as if God did not dwell in them. There are thousands, too, that profess to be of the true fold who are also unconscious of the Divine presence, who have lost charity, that is, the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost and are spiritually dead. I do not say that they have lost faith and hope, but they assuredly lost God's

love by their sinfulness, and in time have become callous to their eternal interests and are abandoned by the Holy Spirit. Their frequent relapse into sin has been a canker that has eaten away the life of grace. It is a fearful retribution that overtakes the habitual sinner who lives for the world and nothing else. St. Paul says: *The sensual man perceiveth not the things of the spirit of God, because they are foolishness unto him; neither can he understand them, because they are spiritually examined.* Worldlings know not the things of God, because they do not spiritually discern nor taste them. They spend their years in revelling, in wallowing in gross sins of sensuality, and God afflicts them with spiritual blindness, and they fall into the pit of their eternal death. They have grieved the Holy Spirit until they quenched His light, and, as the Saviour says, they die in their sins. I ask you to recall to your minds what you once were, how dead you were because of sin, how you were lepers white as snow, how you turned your back on God's light and lived in bondage of manifold sins. What a fearful condition was yours! God took you from out the grave of your own sins and vices, while your souls were putrefying in it, and your resurrection from that state of spiritual death was as much a miracle of God's supernatural power as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. *God had mercy and love to you.* At least give Him thanks for what you have received. Remember also that relapse into sin brings earthly and eternal punishment with it: the loss of God's grace here and the loss of God

Himself hereafter. The very next sin you rashly commit may put the seal of condemnation on your soul. "Let the grace which you have received," says St. Bernard, "inspire you with some fear; this fear ought to increase when you lose that grace. Fear especially when you have recovered grace, for if you lose it again, it may, perhaps, never be restored to you."

But we can hope for the best, when our intentions are good and firm. We can always hope for God's greatest gifts. To be saints and that is our vocation, great gifts are needed, and it would be a false humility to say, as we often say, that we do not hope to be saints. If you hope one day to stand perfect before God's white throne, you must be saints in some sense now on earth. You can then reasonably ask God for His greatest gifts to live in holiness and virtue during your sojourn on earth. You must first beg for the love of God which is the life of your soul, for that love that will make you love God with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole soul and your whole strength. Then you must ask God to give you the grace to do His holy will on earth. You say to the Lord in your daily prayer: "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." Ask that as the angels and saints do in heaven, so you may do on earth. Banish all sin, divest yourself of all corruption, free yourself from all rebellion, and do God's will steadfastly by endeavoring to save your soul and to glorify His name.

And while, like the profitable servant, you make

the talents which the Lord has entrusted to you fructify a hundred-fold, avoid everything that would be redolent of sin or ingratitude. Too many of us are like that servant who concealed his talent in a napkin aud buried it in the ground. When the Master asked him on his return what profit he had made, he not only had no interest to give the Master, but also insulted Him by his bold and impertinent answer: *Thou art an austere man.* We add insult to injury when we commit sin upon sin.

And guard yourself vigilantly against the occasions of sin. The man who seeks the occasions of sin is a man who deserves the severest punishment of God. He shows that he does not appreciate God's kindness, nor even God's immensity; he places a mean value on God when he prefers God s creatures to Himself. He proves also that he has no real hatred for sin, for he is ever seeking it and ever committing it. He is consequently no true child of the adoption made by the benign offices of the tender Saviour; he has an unfilial and hardened heart, and the Father will cut him off from his inheritance.

Let us all pray God never to fall into sin again. This is the one great lesson which we ought to draw from these holy exercises of Lent-time. The Lenten-tide is intended to free men from sin, to strengthen them in the pursuit of virtne, and to begin an epoch in the life of the world with the blessing of heaven on ourselver, our homes and our brethren. To use the words of the prophet: ***This is all the fruit that the sin thereof shall be taken***

away. (Is. xxvii. 9.) In God's name, let us begin a new life of prayer, sacramental duty, and fidelity to God's law and the commandments of the Church. *This do and thou shalt live.* May the God of hosts protect us, inspire us with good resolutions, and fortify us in the way of salvation, in which we purpose henceforth to walk.

SECOND SERIES

OF

LENTEN SERMONS

ON

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

PRECEDED BY A SERMON ON

SIN IN GENERAL.

SERMON I.

SIN IN GENERAL.

Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. (3 John i, 11.)

The law of Christian justice obliges us to avoid evil and to do good. Evil is contrary to the divine law and therefore is sin. The good is in accordance with that law, and it comprises the practice of the virtues and the performing of worthy works. There are two kinds of sin, original and actual sin. Original sin is the sin which Adam and Eve committed in the earthly paradise, when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Their sin was transmitted as a sorrowful inheritance to us with all its fatal consequences, because the will of our first parents enclosed within itself the will of posterity and we have all accordingly sinned in Adam. Actual sin is the sin which we commit of our own volition. It is actual sin which the law of Christian justice commands us to avoid. Our Baptism delivered us from the bondage of original sin, and if after being purified by the salutary waters of that Sacrament, we feel inclined to evil, that inclination alone does not constitute sin. It were well for us before we inquire into the nature and effects of the specific sins, known as the capital or deadly sins, to view sin in general and the evil consequences which proceed from it. Let us consider:

I. What is sin?
II. What are its consequences?

I.

Actual sin is a wilful transgression of God's law. All theologians, following St. Augustine, teach that actual sin is nothing else than a voluntary transgression of God's law manifested in thought, desire, word, act or omission. The evil forbidden by the law of Christian justice, which we call sin, may be committed, as we see from the definition, in five different ways.

The eternal law which the sinner violates is the expression of God's infinite wisdom, inasmuch as it regulates the actions of intelligent creatures. When our will is adverse to the supreme will of God, it must of necessity, according to St. Augustine, disturb the order which God has ordained for all creation animate and inanimate. Sin which is the opposition of our will to God's will is then an open revolt against divine goodness and wisdom. The evil of sin consists in this that the creature dares to rise insolently against the will of the creator and to follow the impulse of his own disorderly desires. Sin is then a disorder. It breaks the law of order which should lead all things to God, as we see in the harmony of nature. If the sun were to refuse to give its light, the earth could not produce what is necessary for man's life. If the sea were to break through its barriers, everything would be destroyed. If the members of the human body were to rise in rebellion, if the different organs were to refuse to do their functions, the body would become immovable and would perish. If man's intelligence became

obscured and reason deviated, then the soul would become demented and foolish. If, in society, order is disregarded, authority despised, subordination violated, everything becomes confused, and anarchy and disorder are the result. Intellectual, moral and religious disorder leads directly to sin. In breaking the bonds which attach the soul by grace to God, sin throws perturbation into the intellectual faculties by concupiscence and into the body by the revolt of the senses. So wicked a thing is sin that the insult we offer by it to the Most High, whose nature and perfections are infinite, is, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, in a certain manner also infinite. *Sin committed against infinite Majesty,* says the Angelic Doctor, *acquires thereby a malice, so to speak, infinite.* In fact, it were nigh impossible, O man, to express all the wicked extravagance of your conduct when you commit sin. You are but nothing; God has given you being: without Him you can do nothing; without Him life would leave you immediately. Is it not then a monstrous disorder to revolt, in your pride, against the sovereign Lord of the universe, to wish to be your own master, to trample under foot the decrees of the eternal Legislator in order that you may follow the blind dictation of your passions? Do you not deserve the reproach: *Why is earth and ashes proud?* (Eccli. x, 9.)

When a man insults worldly rulers, he renders himself liable to very severe punishment. When your children or your servants despise your orders, and make you the object of their ridicule, your anger is inflamed against them. What a shameful crime then it is to heap outrage on the King of Kings, the sovereign Ruler of earthly princes, Divine Majesty before which

angels, men and all creatures together are as nothing, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity.* (xl, 17.)

The great, in fact, the sole cause of sin is man's own will; without the will, as St. Augustine says and reason dictates, insult to God would be impossible. Theologians mention among the causes of sin some interior, such as ignorance, concupiscence, and malice; others exterior such as the world and the devil. But these causes never, as St. Gregory of Nyssa observes, expose us to punishment, unless our will has given a full consent to them.

I pass over the numerous kinds of ignorance, and simply make reference to *invincible* and *vincible* ignorance, which alone concern the subject we are treating.

We are in a state of invincible ignorance when after employing all means and without our fault, we do not come to a knowledge of any of God's commandments, or any prohibition, or when we do not remark that we have sinned. In such circumstances, in which we cannot avoid what is forbidden, we commit no sin.

On the contrary, ignorance is vincible, and consequently culpable, when it has its origin in negligence, and especially in the manner taken to ignore the truth. There is manifest sin in this. David asked forgiveness for sins which he had committed through culpable ignorance: *The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember.* (Ps. xxiv, 7.)

Alas! how many Christians there are who live in sin solely because they are ignorant of the truths of

Religion, the fundamental principles of Catholic doctrine and morality? They appear to be little concerned about their state, thinking, perhaps, to excuse themselves to the sovereign Judge with these words: *We did not know it!* This is a fatal mistake. For on Judgment-day, when all hearts shall be searched, the pastors of souls, the preachers of God's word, and other ministers of the Lord will be obliged to testify against these sinners and to say that in spite of the most pressing entreaty and the most urgent exhortation, they always refused to be instructed. And do not the words of the royal Prophet apply to every one of them: *He would not understand that he might do well.* (Ps. xxxv, 4.) That is to say, he refused to learn to do well.

Concupiscence solicits us strongly to sin. We have all had a woful experience of this. We feel within us our senses fighting against our spirit. Ill-regulated desires and the disorderly motions of our passions trouble our hearts. But unless we so will, concupiscence can never lead us to sin. It may exercise our virtue, and the Lord who subjects us to this trial promises, in the future, to crown our courageous resistance.

Alas! it is our own sinfulness that throws us into perdition. Knowing sin and thoroughly competent to vanquish it with the help of God's grace, we continue to be separated from God and give loose rein to the unclean desires that excite us; we hold in derision the laws of God and estrange wilfully our lives from Him. We are like those of whom Job spoke: *Who, as it were, on purpose have revolted from Him, and would not understand all His ways.* (xxxiv, 27.) The demon, whose envy brought sin and death to the world (Wisd.

ii, 24.), prowls about us like a roaring lion and endeavors to drive us into his snares, to draw us to destruction, but he cannot harm us as long as we resist him; his infernal suggestions are of no avail without our consent, and our resistance covers him with shame and puts him to ignominious flight, as St. James says: *Resist the devil, and he will fly from you.* (iv, 7.)

The world, which St. Augustine interprets as the impious and the wicked of the world, will, doubtless, entice us towards evil, if we put ourselves in the way of such danger. It stands to reason that it should be so. *He that toucheth pitch*, says Scripture, *shall be defiled with it, and he that hath fellowship with the proud shall put on pride.* (Eccli. xiii, 1.) The Israelites were drawn to idolatry by contact with idolators: *They were mingled among the heathens, and learned their works, and served their idols.* (Ps. cv, 35.) We should keep away from the society of the wicked, and be content to pray to God to touch their hearts and turn them to Him.

What a fearful outrage then there is in sin, which violates with so much insolence God's holy, supreme law! Every thing in creation save man respects and obeys God. *All kings shall serve Him and shall obey Him.* (Dan. vii, 27.) To the stars of the heavens and to the earth He hath given a precept, and the orb above replies: *I am here.* Man alone dares to say: *I will not obey.* He not only disobeys God, but his sin in its intrinsic malice, implies a denial of God, it would destroy God if it could. By contempt and violation of God's law, the sinner denies the knowledge of God, saying derisively: *How doth God know?* (Ps. lxxxii, 11.) He extends his malice, for the sinner when he

commits sin laughs at God's threats, believes not in His justice, and despises His punishments. Let us never cease to sorrow for the misfortune of having committed serious and frequent offences against God. Let us ask Him for strength to avoid sin in the future. Detest nothing more in the world than sin, and pray God that you may detest it more and more every day.

II.

The sin which the law of Christian justice commands us to shun is actual sin which sullies the whiteness of the soul. The uncleanness which the soul contracts draws on it all punishments, spiritual and temporal. Sin dethroned Adam from his kingship, and sin sends us into everlasting fire. We suffer, because of sin, the deprivation of God here by loss of grace, and the deprivation of God hereafter by loss of His beatific vision. There is for the sinner unrest here, and a bottomless pit, a frightful desert in hell hereafter. The soul that sins is unclean. It becomes, says Scripture, an object of abomination to the Lord. *A corpse,* says St. John Chrysostom, *delivered to the corruption of the grave is not an object so hideous as a soul infected with evil.* The Most High declares by His prophet that sin covers the soul with shameful blemishes: *Thou art stained in thy iniquity before Me, saith the Lord God.* (Jer. 11, 22.)

This stain, according to theologians, is the malice of sin, and it infects the soul till penance effaces it. Chastisement follows sin inevitably. When we commit sin, we provoke the just wrath of God, and misfortune, affliction and adversity fall upon us. *Tribulation and anguish,* says the apostle, *upon every soul*

of man that worketh evil. (Rom. 11, 9.) Look at all the calamities that afflict or have afflicted the nations of the earth, and you may justly say that they are the results of sin; plagues, famine, war, sorrow, pain, death, hell itself and all other evils are the penalties of sin. Remorse of conscience which follows very close on sin is among the punishments of the sinner, a racking and unbearable penalty. When the sinner is tormented by the recollection of his crimes, he can find no rest; he fears and trembles, and the sympathy of his friends cannot calm him. *In that soul,* says St. John Chrysostom, *there rages a continual storm; the waves surge, beat and break uninterruptedly. It is insensible to the harmony of sounds. Filled with fear it finds the delicacies of the table insipid. It retains its fears even in the circle of most faithful friends.* David, full of remorse, thus complains: *There is no peace for my bones, because of my sins.* (Ps. xxxvii, 4.) Sin is assuredly a frightful monster and a monster fertile in evils. It engenders sorrow, the consequence of the torment that agitates the guilty soul. It engenders other sins: *Deep calleth on deep.* (Ps. xli, 8.) The sinner after his first experience commits another sin, which is, as it were, the penalty of the former fault. He renders himself unworthy the particular help of grace; he grows weary of fighting against his passions; he yields at last and is shamefully vanquished. *Men who are abandoned by grace,* says St. Thomas Aquinas, *yield to their passions, and in this sense we may say that sin is always a punishment of a former prevarication.*

Of all the chastisements of sin the most terrible to our mind is the blindness of understanding and the

hardness of heart that inevitably follow the frequent commission of sin. The power of grace is destroyed; the sinner has no longer the bright light that formerly guided him in the way of justice. His heart feels no more the sweet attraction to virtue. The blind, unfortunate creature rushes headlong to perdition without perceiving the abyss yawning to receive him. Pharaoh, who was the witness of many miracles and had been severely punished, should have been induced, so it would seem to any thinking man, to detest his perfidy towards the Israelites and to have permitted and facilitated their departure for the promised land. Yet, as Scripture tells us, his heart was hardened; he went in pursuit of the chosen people, and at length found, with his whole army, death in the waters of the Red Sea.

The punishments inflicted on the sinner are truly terrible. O my Brother, flee from sin as from the face of a serpent (Eccli. xxi, 2). Say to the Lord in sentiments of the sincerest repentance: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee.* (Luke xv, 18). Express your sorrow for sin in these touching words of the royal Prophet: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. . . . Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed. Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.* (Ps. l). Expiate the faults of your past life. Avenge God's honor for everything that has ever sinned within you: in your intelligence by banishing from it all vain

and unless thought, in your, heart by cherishing the holy grief of repentance; in your body also by subjecting it to salutary privations. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.* (Ps. l., 19.) O my Brethren, engrave deeply on your hearts these words: *Fly from evil, fly from sin.*

In conclusion, we see that to break wilfully the law of God is to sin; it is an enormous crime and its consequences are terrible.

God has destined us for salvation. Sin is the only obstacle, for God saves those only who do His will and fulfill His law. Salvation consists in our union with Jesus Christ, in the enjoyment of God through the everlasting ages. Sin alone separates us from Jesus and makes us lose God. *I am sure*, says St. Paul, *that not any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Rom. viii, 39.) What all creatures taken together cannot do, sin alone can do. We ought then to consider sin as the sole evil of this life. Our troubles and adversities are not really evils. Sin is the real evil; it is your only bar to salvation. Even if you were, were it possible, to enter heaven with the stain of a single sin on your soul, you could not possess God; you would be as miserable as the reprobate whom eternal malediction separates from God. Cleansed from sin and filled with the grace of God, you would not be unhappy in the depths of hell, for you would possess God, and possessing Him, you would enjoy the essential beatitude of the elect. St. Augustine said that he preferred hell without sin to heaven with the blemish of a single sin. Fly from sin, it is the greatest of evils, for it alone will prevent us from possessing God for a happy eternity.

SERMON II.

PRIDE.

Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord. (Prov. xvi, 5.)

To obey properly the precept of Christian justice which commands us to avoid evil, we ought, as has been told us, to endeavor to extinguish the fire of concupiscence and to extirpate the root of sin which is deeply planted in our hearts. If we neglect to do this duty, all sins, even those we call *deadly sins,* will not be slow in springing up in our souls as the poisonous shoots of a corrupt root. We call these sins *capital,* or *deadly* sins because they are the sources of other sins and are, when excessively indulged, destructive or death-bearing to the soul. Therefore, the catechism places them at the head of actual sins. To avoid them, then, is of the greatest importance. They are seven in number: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony and sloth.

We shall endeavor to understand the nature, malice and effects of each of these sins, which are opposed to the love of God and our neighbor, and opposed also to the love that man owes to himself. This knowledge is all-important, and it is also necessary to know the remedies for these sins, since you will not only conceive in this way a holy fear of them, but also will

be enabled to free yourselves from them if you have had the misfortune to have contracted the habit of them.

Pride is justly placed at the head of the capital sins. We see in pride one of the noblest and most essential sentiments of man, by which he recognizes his dependence on God and his resemblance to God, sadly perverted and wretchedly turned to the service of self-love, the fertile source of all evil. The proud man separates himself from God and from the rest of mankind. He becomes his own idol; he wants to receive the homage of other men, the incense due to God alone. He forgets his lowly condition. St. Bernard says: *There is nothing higher than God and nothing lower than the clay man was made of.*

Let us consider:

I. What is Pride?

II. What are the principal remedies for Pride?

I.

Pride, according to the Holy Fathers, is an inordinate love of one's own greatness. We remark that it is called an inordinate love. Our greatness does not become pride until it becomes inordinate; circumscribed by just limits, it is permissible. To aspire to honors by just means, by the use of ability or talent, by the medium of fine arts, by display of bravery, all this is honorable greatness of soul. To demand of our inferiors: our children, workmen, or servants, legitimate homage is not pride. When, however, we wish to be greater in the sight of men than we really are; when we arrogate to ourselves the glory which we subtract from God and exalt ourselves unduly to the detriment of

others; when we take complacence in our own greatness, and to obtain it, employ doubtful or unjust means, then we are indulging an inordinate desire, and are guilty of the sin of pride. This sentiment is called in Scripture an intoxication of mind. Pride has, in fact, all the marks of intoxication. Drink works a complete change in man. It excites foolish thoughts and desires in his mind and heart; his words and actions become ridiculous and extravagant; and the man, after a short interval, is irrational and unrecognizable. Pride also misleads him that is possessed of it; it inspires the most foolish ideas, the most indiscreet desires and leaves man scarcely the free use of reason.

To convince you of all that I have advanced, I have only to speak to you of the five kinds of ramifications of pride and the conduct of those who are led by their dictation. These are arrogance, ambition, vainglory, boasting and hypocrisy.

1. First of all, the proud man professes a high esteem of himself; this is arrogance. His heart is inflated, and he exhibits himself to his own view in a light exclusively favorable. He discovers in himself perfections and advantages which nobody else can see. He boasts of his talents and admirable qualities; he trusts to his own strength and regards the success he has obtained as the result and proof of his ability. He disdains to have recourse to God in prayer, or to ask His help in temptation, peril or the vicissitudes of this mortal life. Not considering himself a sinner, he does not humble himself before God and never implores divine Mercy. Filled with contempt for others, he prefers himself to all and sees nothing in others except what should humiliate them, while he remains the object of his own stupid admiration.

Recall to your mind the Pharisee of the Gospel and his exceeding pride. He was one day in the temple with a publican. The latter did not even once presume to lift his eyes to heaven. The former selected a place where he would attract the notice of all who entered the House of Prayer, and there he gave expression to his foolish esteem for his pretended virtue: *O God,* he said in his insolent prayer, *I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers; as also is this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* (Luke xviii, 11, 12.) Here is a faithful picture of pride and arrogance. Men of this stamp think that they are the only holy, perfect beings on earth. They treat all others as incarnate fiends, and when opportunity offers, they load them with contempt. They think that they alone are capable of undertaking and conducting enterprises to a successful issue. They seem to think that they alone are impeccable, and consequently expose themselves rashly to the most threatening dangers. When they fall through their own temerity, they even dare to complain of God for having refused them help to which they believed they had a special right.

2. Arrogance produces ambition, which is the immoderate desire of advancing oneself, of attracting praise and applause, and of exalting oneself unduly above others. Thence proceeds the thirst for honors, the ardent pursuit of dignities. A place of honor and trust becomes vacant for one or another cause. The ambitious man thinks only of succeeding to it without ever considering whether he is fitted for it or not. It matters less to him whether he will jeopardize his salvation or not in his new position. To what crimes,

to what excess has not ambition, in all times, urged vain and proud men? What have they not done to gain the end so vehemently desired? What shameful intrigues have they not hatched to obtain honorable positions, in which they were hardly installed when their incompetency was revealed?

We must not deceive ourselves by believing that ambition is the sin only of the upper class of society. This subject concerns all of us. We meet with ambition everywhere. The desert, the village, the market-town have their ambitious men as well as the cities. The world is full of them. Everybody appears to be infected with this vice. Every state of life has its ambition. The poor man thirsts for riches, and the lower class does foolish things to rise above its condition. The servant ambitions to be master; the commoner, to be a lord. If we have acquired a little of this world's wealth, we wish to ascend in the scale of social distinction, and if we fail to be thus recognized, we try to domineer over our equals. It is a prevalent vice in this world, to desire to be more than we really are. We envy our neighbor's prosperity, and are grieved because we have not his success added to our own. Does not daily experience confirm all that I have said? If we search our hearts, we shall find traces of ambition in them.

3. Vain glory, the third form of pride, consists in the complacence we find in human esteem, or in the eager search for men's praise. To obtain this, there is nothing that we will not do, nothing that we will not sacrifice. The rich purchase applause by apparent generosity, by the luxury of their mansions, retinue and apparel. Those who have received as their por-

tion natural talents and brilliant qualities have an exaggerated opinion of their personal worth and wish to force public esteem and homage, which they think are due to their superior worth. They grow irritated at the silence which covers any action that they consider startling and worthy general notice. If they do not presume to beg openly for praise, they use all kinds of artifice to provoke it, they interrogate insidiously those who witness it, and they feign discontent to draw out explanations.

Fools who are intoxicated by empty smoke! Of what use are the esteem and applause of men except to destroy the fruit and the reward of our works? Jesus Christ has said: *Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them, otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven.* (Matt. vi, 1.) We may perform the greatest acts of virtue, distribute large alms to the poor, practise the severest mortifications, support patiently the most fearful trials, or convert thousands of souls to the light of faith, yet if we do all these things with a view of gaining the esteem and applause of men, we shall lose entirely the merit otherwise due them. Vain glory will draw down punishment on us instead of the reward to which we might have a claim, if we had done all for God's sake.

Vain glory was the deadly sin of the Pharisees, and our Saviour's zeal was constantly arrayed against it. *The Scribes and the Pharisees,* He said, *have sitten in the chair of Moses. All things whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do, but according to their works, do ye not; for they say and do not. . . . . And all their works they do, for to be seen of men.*

. . . *They love the first places at feasts.* . . . *and to be called by men, Rabbi.* (Matt. xxiii, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7.) Our Lord counsels us to conceal our good works as much as we can so that our heavenly Father who sees the most secret things and desires that they should be done for His glory shall give us our reward. It is the greatest mistake in the world to think that the praise and demonstrations of esteem with which men are so lavish come from a sincere heart. We are greatly deceived by them. Often the man who is despised receives marks of profound respect. He that is lauded to his face is, in his absence, the object of cutting sarcasm and bitter criticism. Are not the fulsome eulogies which are thrown in a man's face deliberate outrages? The man who speaks to you in such fashion wants a favor from you; he knows that you are a vain-glorious and arrogant man, hence he besieges your weak spot with flattery. Is not this, as regards yourself, a cruel insult? Ah! there is nothing more contemptible than pride.

4. The fourth form of pride is boasting, which consists in praising ourselves. It is what may be called a *very American practice.* Is not this vice, Christians, the height of folly and ridicule? Yet we are condemned often to listen to men pronouncing their own panegyrics. It is not only an un-Christian, but a very low habit. When some men do not dare herald their praises openly, they do it in a secret way; they humiliate and even blame themselves to obtain the praise of others. What an abhorrent vice that is which urges sinners to boast of their crimes and excess; the drunkard to glory in his debauchery; the spiteful man, in his revenge; the libertine, in his infamy! Unfortunate

men! They only prove by their shameful language that they have reached that fatal pass of hardness of heart and impenitence that bode no happiness for them in the future.

5. The fifth form of pride is hypocrisy. This is the most sinful form of all, because it makes religion serve the uses of vanity and thus commits a horrible profanation. Hypocrisy is a feigned and false piety, apparent piety which conceals the greatest disorders under the veil of virtue.

Christ traces out for us in the Gospel a faithful picture of hypocrisy personified in the Scribes and the Pharisees, and at the same time launches His malediction against them. He shows them to us when they gave alms; they sounded the trumpet to gather men that the latter might witness their deed. They prayed usually in the synagogues and public places that men might observe them and call them just. They paid tithes scrupulously on the smallest things, while they seized by force the goods of the orphan and the widow. They strained out the gnat and swallowed the camel, that is to say, they affected rigorism in the smallest practices and violated the most essential points of the Law. They made clean the outside of the cup, but left the inside dirty, that is, exteriorly they were austere in manner, while their conscience was burdened with great crimes and crying iniquities. They were whited sepulchres fair to look at exteriorly, but within full of dead men's bones and filthiness. They seemed to be righteous in the eyes of men, but their souls were corrupt and abominable in the sight of God. What hideous hypocrisy characterized these men!

Yet there are hypocrites among Christians who are

far more guilty in God's eyes than were Scribe and Pharisee. These make the holy channels of grace subservient to their bad purposes, and they dare, by their unworthy confessions and sacrilegious communions, to profane the adorable Body and precious Blood of Jesus Christ. They approach the Holy Table with the appearance of piety, faith and humility, but they receive their Lord, like Judas, into hearts filled with pride and sullied with crime.

Let us examine our hearts and see if we do not discover some traces of these different forms of pride.

What are the principal remedies against Pride? They are the frequent consideration of God's greatness and our own nothingness, the thought of the shame which is the inseparable companion of pride, and also the punishment and fatal results which pride entails.

The first remedy for pride is the consideration of God's greatness. When Lucifer, at the head of his rebellious host, revolted against God's sovereignty, he was met by the Archangel Michael and his faithful angels who battled victoriously to the war-cry: WHO IS LIKE UNTO GOD? In these words we find a specific remedy for pride, Lucifer's sin. When we are assailed by temptations of pride, let us fight them, saying in our hearts the angelic battle-cry: WHO IS LIKE UNTO GOD? What folly it is in me to attempt to exalt myself above God, and this I do when I gave in to the dictation of pride and follow the leadership of self-love. *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning?* (Is. xiv, 12.) And why fallen so low? Because he said in his pride: *I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most High.* (Ibid.) And what was his pun-

ishment? *Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit.* (Ibid.) We are indeed very rash when we forget the grandeur, the majesty of the King of Kings.

While we consider God's greatness, we are naturally led to think of our own nothingness. O man, what art thou? Why exalt thyself, when thou hast so many reasons to humble thyself? Wherever we look, we find ample motives to acts of humility. The past, the present and the future should teach us this lesson. The *past* shows us our own nothingness. Yesterday we were less than atoms; we did not exist at all. At the beginning of life we were powerless to do anything, too feeble to help ourselves. What care was exercised in rearing us, in developing reason and will, and in teaching us how to lead our lives properly! Otherwise we would verify the Wise man's judgment: *A child that is left to his own will bringeth his mother to shame.* (Prov. xxix. 15.) The *present* offers to us only dangers, cares and miseries without number.

Our souls are the mere playthings of inconstancy; our minds are plunged into darkness; our wills are inclined to evil; our imagination is agitated by folly; our conscience is stricken with remorse; our body is subject to disease and misery. We are troubled with many wants, and to maintain life is the cause of the most cruel anxiety. The *future* is yet more sorrowful to behold and more humiliating. Death and the grave await us. We shall be cut off from all that we possess. We are ignorant of the lot in store for us at God's tribunal, where we must stand immediately after death. Yet we are filled with self complacence, when the sight of so much misery ought to draw tears and sighs from

us. What a mistake, to delude ourselves with the idle fancies that pride inspires! We are nothing, we know that we are nothing, and that we can do nothing without God's help. *If any man think himself*, says St. Paul, *to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* (Gal. vi, 3.)

When we consider the shame which is the inseparable companion of pride, we shall not allow ourselves to be guided by its dictates. There is nothing more odious, nothing more wretched than pride. The proud man is the object of general criticism, and his fellow-men show the same contempt for him as he shows for them. He wants to be first everywhere, to degrade others, and make their degradation a stepping-stone to his importance. A harmless word, a mere nothing irritates his morbid susceptibility and inflames his wrath. His conversation is intolerable, because he is the only one who speaks and he makes himself the inexhaustible subject of his discourse. Wishing ever to be lord paramount, he angers those who contradict him, and he provokes everywhere discord and violent contentions. (Prov. xiii, 10.) He exposes himself to general contempt all for a little smoke.

The fourth means of combatting pride is to consider its fatal consequences and the terrible punishments with which God afflicts it. The proud man rises insolently against God, despises His sovereign power, and desires to destroy His authority. God also declares war on this foolish man at the very beginning, pursues him everywhere and lets His avenging arm fall heavily on him until He has reduced him to the lowest debasement.

History and experience both furnish us with numer-

ous examples of this truth. Recall to your mind the fate of Lucifer and his rebellious angels. They were princes of the heavenly court, and pride entered their hearts, and refusing to submit to God they were cast into hell forever. In Sacred Scripture read the awful chastisements inflicted for pride on Sannacherib, Nebuchodonosor, Antiochus and Herod Agrippa and you will see how God deals with the proud. Profane history abounds in similar examples, and the deaths of kings who rose in their pride against God and His holy church have often been object lessons to their successors. Have we not seen proud men reduced to beggary and degradation?

The greatest punishment, however, of pride is reserved for hell. There the proud will be continually humiliated. What torment will be theirs when the demons and the reprobate shall trample them under foot and deride them for eternity! What an increase of torment will it be for them to see those whom they loaded with contempt on earth enjoying the glory of heaven! While the meek and humble of heart shall live among the angelic choirs, the proud shall consort with devils for all eternity. See, Christians, God's judgment on the proud. Should not this spectacle inspire us with a holy fear of pride. Let us detest and beware of this abominable vice that has its temporal and eternal punishment. Your own nothingness should be ever before your eyes, your origin and your destiny should be ever before your minds. Ask yourselves often with St. Paul: *What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory? That is as if it were thine own.* (1 Cor. iv, 7.) Meditate on the shame that accompanies pride,

on the chastisement, earthly and eternal, that God deals out to the proud, and you will, without doubt, embrace holy humility as a motive-power of your lives. You will accomplish in yourselves the Saviour's promise: *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* (Luke xviii, 14.)

SERMON III.

COVETOUSNESS.

Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. (Ps. cxviii, 36.)

The vice of covetousness is so common in the world that we can hardly find one who is not tainted with it and who is not possessed of its spirit. *From the least of them,* says the prophet, *even to the greatest, all are given to covetousness* (Jer. vi, 13.) We know that the poor in spirit are called blessed, because they go not after gold nor put their trust in money or treasures (Eccli. xxxi, 8), but who are these? *Who is he and we will praise him?* (Ibid.) They are rarely met with, because nearly all men, if, from a covetous spirit, they do not steal their neighbor's property, at least seek too eagerly what is their own. *All seek the things that are their own.* (Philip. ii, 21.) Hence St. Ambrose has finely said that covetousness is a fever with which almost all mortals are afflicted: *Covetousness is our fever.* It is a very malignant fever, which is the root and origin of all evils and spiritual infirmities, according to St. Paul: *The desire of money is the root of all evils.* (1 Tim. vi, 10.) It is a death-dealing fever, which sends many to eternal death and damnation. It is a dangerous fever, which baffles all remedies, according to St. Zeno: *Covetousness is an*

incurable pest, with which the whole world is consumed.

Covetousness, like pride, is a species of idolatry, with this difference however, that pride makes a divinity of itself, while covetousness addresses its worship to money. *Mortify*, says St. Paul, *covetousness, which is the service of idols.* (Col. iii, 5.)

Let us consider:

I. What is Covetousness?

II. What are its fatal effects?

I.

Covetousness is, according to St. Augustine's definition, *an inordinate love of goods and riches.* We remark here the expression *inordinate love,* for the desire or the love of goods and riches does not always constitute covetousness, it becomes such when it is *inordinate.*

It is fitting that we labor to acquire and preserve all that is necessary for ourselves and those who depend on us. Prudence demands that we should provide for the future, but even in such praiseworthy labor, we should keep within the limits prescribed by reason and God's law. When our desire surpasses the measure of our wants and troubles the peace of our hearts, when it makes us neglect our duties as Christians, when it violates the law of God or the rights of our neighbor, then covetousness becomes a sin and renders us vile slaves, overwhelmed with miseries without number.

To leave no doubt in your minds about this, I shall show you the covetous man in three different aspects: 1 as occupied with amassing his treasures; 2 as possess-

ing them; and 3 as losing them. In these three conditions, you will see the most unhappy and wretched of men.

1. The covetous man employed in his quest for lucre exhausts his mental and physical faculties, obtaining neither rest nor reward. If it cost him much to procure the necessaries of life, how much more does it cost to secure the superfluity? Care and fatigue must equal the vehemence of the desire for wealth and the difficulty of obtaining it. For the covetous man the days pass too quickly, and the nights are too long for the satisfaction of his desires. He is thinking and calculating incessantly. The faculties of his soul and the nerves of his body are kept in a continual state of tension. Correspondence, journeys from home and law-suits leave him no rest. The master is forced to descend to base acts against which the servant would revolt. He is compelled to become the slave of those from whom he hopes for profit; he must brave perils, and often expose his health and honor. In all these wearisome labors, he is reduced to a poor, hurried and insufficient diet. To all this one may answer: *The first efforts are very trying, but at least rest comes with the acquisition of riches.* This could be the case, but is not. The covetous man has no rest; the ordinary workingman is far happier than he. The latter at least finishes his toil at the approach of night, eats contentedly the morsel of bread he has earned by the sweat of his brow, and regains in healthful sleep the strength necessary to continue his work on the morrow. This salutary rest is refused the covetous man. Care takes sleep away from him. His thirst for money is insatiable. It grows more burning every day, never paus-

ing to say: *This is enough!* When he looks at his treasures, he dreams of more. Like a man who is a prey to a high fever, he drinks continually, and his thirst is never quenched. The reward of all this industry, surely that is something of which the covetous man has no need. He seeks for what is superfluous, for that which he could easily disregard. When his avaricious desires are satisfied, he will possess that which he will not use. What is the difference between what we have not and what we do not use? The covetous man, with all his care and effort again comes to nothing. He shortens life to increase his possessions and to diminish his enjoyments. He digs the bowels of the earth to find gold; he has scarcely found it when he buries it in depths whence he will never withdraw it. *What folly,* says St. Ambrose. *You draw gold from the bosom of the mountain only to hide it again. The lives of so many needy ones are hidden at the bottom of your coffers. What is superfluous for you would support them. And you prefer to keep your treasures, rather than prolong the existence of your brethren.* Who would want to be a slave to such a vile passion? *It is,* says St. Gregory of Nyssa, *a tyrant who refuses all rest to his slaves.* St. Asterius calls it an infernal fury. St. John Chrysostom termed it a pitiless monster, a cruel tyrant who exposes those who serve him to a thousand dangers and to terrible chastisement; who in appearance mild and merciful, is as heartless and pitiless as a wild beast given up to all its fury.

2. The covetous man, perhaps, is more happy when he finds himself in possession of what he has sought with so much ardor? No, my Brethren, his care in-

creases with his riches. It has cost him much effort to amass his wealth, now he fears to lose it. He distrusts even his family and his most intimate friends. The poor man sleeps in peace; the rich man dreams of a thousand dangers and fears to enjoy the fruit of his labor. This is partly the punishment which God has in store for him even in this life. He gives the miser goods which He does not allow him to enjoy. Anxiety is his reward. He watches constantly over what will become some day the prey of prodigality. He carries with him the malediction which Christ has pronounced: *Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation! Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger!* (Luke vi, 24, 25.)

3. The misery of the covetous man does not reach its height until he is stricken with the partial or total loss of his riches. St. Ambrose narrates the following fact: *I once knew a man who, in going out to work in the fields, purchased small loaves of bread equal in number to the days he would be engaged in work. His barns were filled to overflow with grain, and he kept them carefully locked. Instead of using his abundance of wheat, he was content with insufficient food. A man worthy credence assured me that this man never saw an egg cooked without lamenting the loss of the germ which could bring forth a living thing which would be as productive as the hen whence the egg came. I write you this in order that you may recognize in this sordid avarice the vengeance of God's justice, which made this miser expiate, by voluntary hunger, the tears of the needy to whom he was insensible.* If such a small outlay would thus rack his soul, what would be his grief if a law-suit or some unforeseen accident

robbed him of a part or the whole of his fortune? We have both known and heard of misers who could not stand such a blow, and put an end to their lives, proving by their extreme action that the loss of their money was their supreme misfortune. Similar judgments, unaccountable seemingly, have fallen, even more frequently than we imagine, upon the covetous. God, in order to punish them and at the same time give us a lesson, strips them even in this life of their possessions, because they do not employ them according to the purposes of His Providence. Even if these punishments are of rare occurrence, yet there is always death which will rob the covetous one day of all their riches. These wretched men see death, as we see a storm, coming from afar. What a harrowing thought to them that the grim monster which nobody can oppose proposes now to deprive them of all their possessions and to separate them ruthlessly from all they loved so much in this world! *O death*, says the Wise man, *how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!* (Eccli. xl. 1.) If the thought of death strike such terror into the covetous man's heart, what will the experience of death bring him? We may say justly that the miser dies twice. The poor man dies when the soul breaks asunder the bonds that unite it to the body, but the miser must also break the chain that binds him to his riches, and this is as strongly welded as the bond between soul and body. Why should we not rather follow the Saviour's example? Why should we not listen to His fatherly counsel? *Lay not up*, He says, *to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal.* (Matt. vi, 19.) Take heed

not to attach your heart to them. To the reasons which our Saviour gives as an antidote against covetousness, we also add the following motives: these riches are acquired with great difficulty, are retained always with nervous disquiet, and are lost with great distress of mind and heart.

Think after such a life of excitement, anxiety and unrest what little recompense you have for your labors. If you had worked for God and heaven as assiduously as you have done for the *filthy lucre* of this world, you would now have reached an eminent degree of sanctity, you would have a claim, in a certain sense, to eternal life. What is your present situation? Your riches have degraded you in the sight of God and man because of the note of injustice attached to them. You are very criminal in God's sight, and have no title to ask a heavenly reward for a purely earthly labor. If you had preserved sanctifying grace with the same care that you have kept worldly goods, your soul would yet be adorned with it and you would possess a treasure which never could be taken from you. You have stored up goods, and as the Prophet says, (Ps. xxxviii, 7) you know not for whom you have gathered these fatal treasures that draw on you envy and enmity. (Eccles. v, 12.) You will, perhaps leave all these riches in foolish, prodigal and ungrateful hands when you die; you have possessed, but not enjoyed them. Death will take all from you and give them to a stranger, very likely a mortal enemy who may squander them in foolish and riotous living. How much wiser you would be, if now you would manifest the same zeal for Christian perfection as you show in hoarding up money, if you would hide your treasures in the

bosom of the poor instead of burying them in your coffers, and by this generous act, merit the mercy of your Judge. God's mercy is our only durable treasure; it alone can assure us eternal happiness.

II.

Covetousness is the fruitful parent of other sins and finally of eternal damnation.

An evil tree cannot produce but evil fruit. Covetousness which is evil in its nature and properties must have fatal consequences. To speak of all of them would demand too much time, and therefore I shall confine myself to referring to the most pernicious amongst them. These are the large number of sins that proceed from covetousness and the near danger of perdition. To see these woful effects in their true light, let us look again at the covetous man in these three states: employed in gathering his riches, in actual possession of them, and losing them.

1. To attain to his end, the covetous man must employ means. Some of these are honest; others, illicit The honest means are usually insufficient to satisfy his insatiable cupidity, and to become rich, the covetous man has recourse too often to other means. He probably practises usury and fraud; he falsifies his merchandise and unjustly overcharges his customers; he commits, in fact, a world of injustice, which he later attempts to condone by the false maxims of worldly wisdom: *Others do the same, why should not I do it?* is one of these. If others do as he does, then they commit injustice and sin as he sins. That is about all the comfort the covetous man may extract from the wrong conduct of others. *It is the trick of the*

trade, the custom among tradesmen, is another deceiving pretext. Custom cannot justify a violation of equity, for the latter is even contrary to the law of nature. The binding force of that law is above custom. *The damage is only small, therefore there cannot be much sin,* is another salve for violated conscience. We must, however, remember that these acts of injustice are constantly repeated, and amount to considerable value in the course of time. When the desire of enriching ourselves is the motive, even small acts of injustice become grave sins in God's sight, and under penalty of damnation, a man guilty of such injustice is bound to indemnify the community injured by his acts, in plain terms to make restitution of the value unjustly acquired and employ it for the benefit of those towards whom he has acted dishonestly. If we once authorize injustice, we might as well turn loose thieves and cheats upon the community.

2. Once in possession of a considerable fortune, the covetous man would sooner permit his heart to be torn from his body than make restitution of another's money. He forgets God and his duties as a Christian from the moment when he gives his soul to riches, and burdened with the care of his treasures, he cannot see above them. He is like a corpse buried in a heap of gold. He grows deaf and insensible to counsel, threats, and eternal truths. Nothing can move him to restore his ill-gotten gains or the property of others. God sometimes makes him feel the rod of divine vengeance here on earth.

We often see those who have amassed a large fortune by crooked ways becoming suddenly spendthrift; they abandon all the traditions of their former economy

and throw themselves headlong into a life of unbridled luxury and extravagant expenditure. Restitution, then, becomes a matter of impossibility, because they claim that to do this righteous work, they could not maintain themselves suitably according to the demands of their social position. Thus they live splendidly at the expense of others. This is a case often met with in our own experience. How shall this pretext be received at God's dread tribunal? *You were given up to sin,* the eternal Judge will say; *you led effeminate lives on the money you wrested unjustly from your fellow-men; you ceased to be Christians, for the Christian renders to every man his due; you have lost all right to heaven.* And is it not a just judgment?

The covetous man, yet blinded by the glitter of his gold, becomes strangely deaf to eternal truths. He may even try to keep up the appearance of a Christian life. At certain times, such as Easter-time or missions, he will go to confession, but his tongue is chained by the fearful vice to which he is addicted, and he does not make a sincere avowal of his sins. He is afraid if he reveal his acts of injustice, he will be told by the confessor that he must make restitution. He approaches the Lord's Table, but he sits there as did Judas, even a greater criminal than Judas who sold his Master but once, while he has repeated sacrilege time after time.

3. Into what a condition is the covetous man plunged when a stroke of misfortune suddenly deprives him of those possessions for which he has sold his soul and his birthright, heaven? His trouble then is frightful to behold as he realizes the unhappy state into which he is incontinently thrown. His soul is overburdened

with the guilt of innumerable sins. He has God, not man, for an enemy, and all his hopes have vanished like smoke in the air. Is it a wonder that he falls into helpless discouragement, into horrible despair as he breaks forth into curses and blasphemies, as he frantically calls for death to put an end to him, and, as often happens, does the work of death with his own hand?

Let us suppose that God spares the covetous man these calamities and allows him to die in the midst of his opulence. Yet what anguish must attend his deathbed? Then vanish all those false maxims by which wickedness deceived itself. The long series of fraudulent and dishonest acts, sacrilegious confessions and communions, arise before his terrified eyes. He will see his numberless iniquities which only sincere repentance can wipe away. He would not deign to think of repenting during life, because he feared that it would cast dishonor upon him in the minds of all. Money has been his God for a long time. Pressed on all sides, laboring under a world of sin, he groans in the fast embrace of despair on his bed of pain. Who knows if the grace of conversion will be given him, for to obtain that saving gift, the knowledge of his sorrowful state, the tears and sighs of true contrition and restitution are all rigorously necessary? Yet he seems to want all these conditions. He is in God's hands, into which it is a terrible thing to fall when sin has darkened our soul.

Perhaps, you may say: *Ought we forget our children?* No, indeed, you cannot forget them. On the contrary, you must use all effort to assure them an inheritance. This inheritance should consist not so

much in temporal possessions as in a good Christian education and the example of your virtues. Goodness of life will be a far better legacy than a colossal fortune. *It is not necessary*, says a master of the Spiritual life, *to leave your child the treasures of this world; he will be rich enough when you have made him pleasing to God.*

Shun the vice of avarice, and think frequently on St. Paul's words: *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* (1 Tim. vi, 6.)

SERMON IV.

LUST.

God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto Sanctification. (1 Thess. iv, 7.)

Much as we would desire not to speak on the subject of the third Capital sin, we are urged by many strong reasons not to pass it by without referring to its abominable character and the terrible punishments God has decreed against all who commit it. It comes within the scope of what we are considering in these thoughtful Lenten days, and its prevalence as a destructive vice everywhere is another motive to make it an important subject well worthy the reflection of all thinking men. Impurity is such a foul vice that St. Paul tells the faithful that they should not even make mention of it among themselves. *All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints.* (Eph. v, 3.)

This shameful vice has made such frightful progress in our days that the Christian preacher is hardly dispensed from raising his voice in solemn warning against it. No place, no condition of life, no age seems to be free from its blighting effects. City and country, the high and the low classes, young and old are carried away with the desire and practice of licentiousness. It is organized in every community by

agents of the devil and it flaunts its glaring seduction in our streets and public places. No vice does more soul-destroying work than impurity. It is nigh impossible to protect youth from its contaminating presence, because its allurements are to be found in our schools and factories, in our social gatherings and daily conversation. It is a syren that bewitches the hearts of all. It is one of the most common and dangerous vices in its attacks. This gave St. Augustine occasion to remark: *That of all the encounters a Christian engages in those in which chastity is at stake are the most difficult, for there the engagements are frequent, and the victories rare.* Let us consider.

I. What is Impurity?

II. What are the Remedies against it?

I.

Impurity is, according to the holy Fathers, an irregular desire of carnal pleasures. The word IRREGULAR to which I call your attention indicates that, in this definition, exception is made of marriage and its legitimate use. The union of man and woman has been instituted by God Himself for the propagation of the human race and as a remedy for concupiscence.

Outside the divine institution of marriage, indulgence in carnal pleasure is contrary to order, is irregular and is known in our catechism as lust, one of the deadly sins. Do not think that we are treating here of the great sins against purity. No, impurity may be committed by all the senses, and I hasten to add that in this matter that the sin when full consent is given is always grievous. We need only recall the

Saviour's words to see the force of this remark: *Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Matt. v, 28.) In the words of St. Paul already quoted: *All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints,* we perceive that this sin may be committed by indecent discourse, equivocal words, unmanly address to persons of the other sex, or in fact to persons of both sexes. We are not permitted to listen to anything that is not permitted to be spoken. You listen to unchaste words, to indecent songs; if you take pleasure in so doing you have become guilty of the sin of impurity. Young people hearken to the unclean hissing of the serpent; the seducer tells them what pleases them; he exaggerates the power of their charms and address. Here is the crisis of the combat. If they give ear to him, if they go one step further, they are inevitably lost. They cannot flatter themselves that they are yet pure even when they pause here; they have listened with pleasure to immoral talk and that is sufficient to make them guilty in God's sight.

What shall we say of the secret sins which are committed against chastity and which have only God for a witness? The sinner thinks that he hides from the view of all, but the all-seeing God is cognizant of his sin and God has marked down his transgression. God saw Onan's abomination, and punished him with death. (Gen. xxxviii, 9.)

There are also undue familiarities between the sexes in social intercourse that are inciting causes to sins of thought and touch, and these sully the purity of soul that should abhor all taint of evil and every manner of license.

It is not only then by the act or consummation of sin, but also by the eyes, the tongue, the ears and the touch that this disgusting sin of impurity may be committed. It is strange that we make so light of this fearful vice and consider it only a human weakness, but when we reflect that Christ died on the cross probably in expiation of no sin more than that of impurity we shall easily understand its great malice. *You are,* says St. Paul, *the temple of God who dwells in you; your members are the members of Jesus Christ.* The libertine does not fear to profane this holy temple, to sully these sacred members. Is not this an abomination? His soul is the image of God, bathed in the precious Blood of the Redeemer, and he destroys its beauty. The Holy Ghost dwells in his heart as in a temple, the unchaste man drives Him from it, puts in His place an idol of flesh, enthrones there a cruel tyrant, the unclean spirit himself. Is not this an outrage? Is it a wonder that St. Isidore said of this sin: *Whatsoever sin you name, you shall find nothing equal to this crime,* and St. Jerome declared: *There is nothing more vile or degrading than to allow oneself to be conquered by the flesh. In no sin,* says St. Thomas, *does the devil delight so much as in sins against chastity.*

O Christians, know ye not the sorrowful effects, the fatal consequences of this shameful vice? When impurity has become once mistress of the heart, it exercises a terrible tyranny over all its faculties. It subjects to its dictation imagination, memory, will and understanding. The soul becomes a slave to its power. It is no wonder that man delivered to the heat of its desires falls into the stupid condition of the beast

of the field, whose brutality he imitates? Is it a wonder that in sullying his body with infamy, in enervating and exhausting it with sensual pleasure, he destroys and annihilates all the strength of his soul, as he loses all bodily vitality.

When impurity gets hold once of man's heart, it becomes ordinarily an incurable evil. Why is this? It is because man has innumerable opportunities to commit, by thought and desire, this base sin. Multiplied relapses strengthen the fatal chain by which necessity as strong as iron drags the sinner on; his heart, which drinks in the unclean poison, is assailed by most violent attacks of this passion. Insensibly this degrading vice becomes indispensable to him, and his soul is darkened by a dense, impure mist which prevents the light of grace from entering it. As it sinks deeper in the mire and drowns in filthy pleasures, how can it fix its regard on eternal truths or find relish in supernatural things? Having once come to this stage in sin, the voluptuous man rejects with contempt all means of salvation; the very thought of them irritates and exasperates him. He closes his heart to every appeal of grace and to all inspirations; he shuts his ears to all wise counsel, and at length abandons altogether the care of his salvation. Is not this hardness of heart, this obstinacy, an evil that is incurable? And does not the whole fault rest in the sinner himself?

When impurity becomes habitual, it is a source of the greatest crimes, and finally of the lowest corruption. It produces forgetfulness of duty to God, an incurable apathy in matters of salvation, contempt for all means conducive to it, and profanation of the sacra-

ments. How can the love of God be found in a heart in which the impudent harlot of paganism reigns?

Impurity produces prodigality and all manner of injustice. Its idol demands piles of gold; it provokes envy, hatred, the mortal enmity of rivals, and it does not recoil before murder. Read the reports of every-day occurrences in our newspapers, and see what a prolific cause of homicide and injury this awful vice is. Yet while it inspires all crimes, this destructive passion would at the same time fain hide its shame.

Again, the ordinary natural effect of this vice is the total loss of faith. Solomon, the wisest of mortals, who was seduced by his love of foreign women, is not the only example of this. We have seen in our own time many lights in church and state led into apostacy and infidelity through the agency of this sin. Irreligion soon follows immorality.

Habitual sensuality opens the way to all kinds of crime. He that has contracted it repels with disgust all recollection of religious duty, for that would seriously interfere with his infamous pleasure and also make him feel bitterly his degradation. He is usually delighted with all that infidels invent, or have invented, against the eternal truths that empoison his enjoyments. He grasps at the most wretched sophisms, the most blatant falsehoods as peremptory proofs, because he endeavors by them to lull to sleep a very bothersome conscience. He will refuse to listen to solid reasoning that would convince him of the evil of his life and the necessity of conversion. When he has at last reached that unfortunate degree of uncleanness that impels him to throw off altogether the troublesome yoke of religion and lose the fear of God, to

destroy all that would hinder the satisfaction of his passion, with what blind and brutal impetuosity he flings himself to perdition? What unbridled license is observable in his conversation, his manner and even his actions! In general gatherings, in the presence of young people, he wounds decency. What artifices he employs to seduce pure and thoughtless souls, to sacrifice them to his infamous passion! Let us speak the truth: there are crimes probably greater than impurity, but there is no vice that produces in its victim such rapid perversity. This shameful sin is abominable in God's sight. Open the sacred Books, and you will read the records of God's summary and terrible vengeance. Why were the cataracts of the heavens and the depths of the sea, in Noah's time, let loose upon the earth? Why was the habitable world, even to the highest mountains, submerged in a destroying deluge, and the whole human race, save eight persons, engulfed in its furious waters? Men fell into dreadful, impure crimes; all flesh had become corrupt, and God repented that He had made man. The dreadful punishment of the deluge followed. Why did the Lord send down torrents of burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain? *The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is multiplied,* says *the sacred Scripture, and their sin* (impurity) *is become exceedingly grievous.* (Gen. xviii, 20.) Why were the sons of Juda, Her and Onan stricken dead? Her was a very wicked man, and Onan committed a detestable deed. Both were slaves to unchastity (Gen. xxviii.) Why were 24,000 Israelites slaughtered in their own blood by the command of Moses? Because they sinned with the daughters of Moab who seduced

them to idolatry. (Num. xxv.) Impurity closes heaven against man and casts him headlong into hell. St. Paul places the impure in the same category with the unjust, the disobedient, the ungodly, sinners, parricides and matricides, and man-slayers, all of whom are threatened by the Law with eternal reprobation (1 Tim., i). St. Paul also says expressly: *No fornicator or unclean person hath inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.* (Ephes. v, 5.) Our Saviour ranges among the things that come from the heart and defile a man evil thoughts and evil acts. (Matt. xv, 19.) If the fearful punishments which fall upon the unchaste in this life and the still more fearful threats of endless punishment which they will realize in the next world will not convert them, we may readily see that this shameful vice is a something more than a mere frailty, that it is in fact a great wickedness. We ought to conceive a salutary horror for it and ever pray God that we may be preserved from its dreadful contamination.

II.

The vice of impurity works devastation in soul and body. It is such a monstrous iniquity that no other sin acquires the hold it exercises over man's moral being. To overcome it and break the chain it has fastened on the soul, we must adopt heroic measures and use the utmost power and vigilance of will.

First, we must have a great distrust of ourselves and a great confidence in God. It is far easier to fly from this sin than to correct it when once we have acquired the habit of it. It is of the greatest importance to take in hand the means to keep from it,

using all the more care because this vice places our eternal salvation in great jeopardy. Let us therefore begin with distrusting ourselves and confiding in God's mercy. God permits us to be tempted in order that when we are sensible of our weakness we shall learn to lean upon Him entirely. *When temptation arises,* says St. Jerome, *and false pleasure fascinates you, hasten, at the least spark that you see, to have recourse to God, and say to Him with David, "Lord, my Help, my Saviour, and my Hope."* This holy Father tells us not only to have recourse to God, but to do so promptly, for the least delay is full of danger. We are continually exposed to this danger. If we give the crafty enemy the least access, he knows how to profit by the advantage, and we cannot easily dislodge him when he has once secured possession of our heart and has placed there the charm of his villainous pleasures. By the help of grace we can forthwith drive out the enemy, no matter how formidable he may be, but we must remember that all our assistance comes from God.

Secondly, the salutary advice which St. Jerome gives us to have recourse to God promptly leads us naturally to another remedy, which is to fight the evil in the beginning. Prudence demands this. We know perfectly that if we do not want to be overcome we must not allow the enemy to obtain a strong position. *Pursue the enemy,* says St. Jerome, *without respite; try to drive him away while he is yet weak.* Prudence also tells us that we must refuse everything to our senses. *Take heed,* says St. Augustine, *not to furnish arms to your enemy; watch over your eyes and ears; be master of your senses. When concupiscence sees*

that it labors in vain, and that with all its efforts it cannot obtain the least success, it will give up the fight and leave you at rest."

Thirdly, the most efficacious remedy is to fly from the occasions of sin. There is stately grandeur of soul in fleeing when duty speaks. *We do not,* says St. Jerome, *sleep tranquilly near a serpent. The lips of a harlot,* says the Wise man, *are like a honey-comb dropping . . . but her end is bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword. . . . Remove thy way far from her and come not nigh the doors of her house.* (Prov. v, 3, 4, 8.)

Vanity has much to do with inciting young people, especially, to this sin. The desire of pleasing and the love of display have been the ruin of many. They attract suitors both honest and malicious. Nothing is more dangerous for some people than the sugared tongue of the seducer. How many there are who, in the beginning, had no guilty intentions have at last been doomed to perdition! Young girls must be particularly on their guard against the class of conscienceless men who, extremely courteous and seemingly devoted, think only of ensnaring their victims to desert them when their ruin is effected and shame has set its blighting mark on their character. The world has small pity for the Magdalen, and her only consolation is in God. Let young women remember that what confers honor and esteem upon them is purity of heart, constancy, resistance to the will of the seducer.

It is a precept certainly very binding on us to avoid all pressing occasions of sin. Now, can we say that we observe this precept when we give loose rein

to our senses, to our eyes with their complacent looks, to our ears with their willing attention, or to our hands with their loose touches? or when we frequent nocturnal gatherings, balls and dances, moonlight excursions or solitary promenades, from none of which we escape without some spiritual damage? Do we keep this precept when we pass our time perusing novels and romances in which there are loose morality, bad philosophy and unnatural views of life? or when we habitually go to theaters in which melodramatic plays, full of suggestive immorality and unbridled license are enacted? We know, or we ought to know, the weakness of our nature. Why should we augment that weakness by seeking fresh dangers? Is not this courting our own downfall? If you put a cat's paw in the fire, that animal will shun fire forever. It is only man that lacks natural prudence. Example has no effect on him. He persists in travelling the slippery way on which others stronger than he have fallen or have hardly prevented themselves from falling.

Another remedy is to abstain from idleness. Idleness is the mother of vice, the source of all sin, especially the sin of impurity. *Idleness*, says St. Bernard, *is a sewer from which arise impure temptations which are never more violent and mighty in sullying the soul than among the class of idle and lazy persons.*

The last remedy we give is to abstain from all kinds of intemperance. *Be not drunk with wine*, says St. Paul, *wherein is luxury* (Eph. v. 18.) *Why*, says St. Jerome, *do you throw oil on the flames which are only too violent already?* If we want to fight concupiscence, we must weaken it, and avoid all that will strengthen

it, especially eschewing the use of spirituous drinks and what is ordinarily called *high living*. Let us battle constantly with this vice which is our most dangerous enemy. A firm will, with the grace of God, will accomplish everything. What is difficult to nature God makes easy by grace. In the sacraments we find plenteous grace. *O ye that have not fallen,* exclaims St. Augustine, *watch lest you fall, and ye that have had that misfortune hasten to rise from that fatal fall.*

SERMON V.

ANGER.

A passionate man provoketh quarrels; and he that is easily stirred up to wrath, shall be more prone to sin. (Prov. xxix, 22.)

There is no sin more common in life than anger. How rarely do we meet with persons who are uniformly mild, gentle and sweetly patient? Yet our Saviour has told us that we should be like Him *meek and humble of heart.* Men become addicted to anger either from wounded pride or injured self-interest. The incitement to it may be something very slight. When this passion becomes excessive it is most destructive of moral and social order. It is a very troublesome evil, because it overflows easily and needs to be constantly watched to be kept within bounds. Probably there is no greater evidence of the Christian spirit than the effort to hold in check all impatience, wrath and resentment. It is a historical fact that by curbing man's choleric nature, the Church toned down the pride of the Roman and gave to the world the Knight of the Middle Ages, who was as famous for his gentleness as for his bravery. Let us not forget that Christ has said: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.* (Matt. v, 5.)

Let us consider:

I. What is Anger?

II. What are its effects?

I.

Anger may be best defined as an inordinate transport of the soul occasioned by an evil or an injury which we have received or believe we have received, and accompanied by the desire of revenge.

Anger is not always a sin. It is, in general, a displeasure caused by an evil which we suffer and which we wish to be removed. To combat an evil which is opposed to sound reason and the law of God is not a culpable act. It is virtuous and praiseworthy zeal for the glory of God. Such was the conduct of Moses, who seeing the idolatry of the Israelites, was seized with indignation, and forthwith gave orders that twenty-three thousand of them should be put to death. (Exod. xxxii.) Such was the anger of Phineas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron who killed, at the critical moment of the licentious idolatry of Settim, a prominent violator of God's law, and thus appeased the divine wrath. (Num. xxv, 7.) We have another instance of holy anger in the conduct of our Blessed Lord when he drove at the end of a lash the buyers and sellers from the Temple. To this legitimate anger are referred the Royal Prophet's words: *Be ye angry and sin not* (Ps. iv, 5), though many commentators explain them as referring to the indignation with which a penitent arms himself against his own sins. St. Francis de Sales, however, very aptly remarks: *It is much more easy not to be angry at all, than to be angry without sinning in it.*

Anger is the cause of many faults, and of sin itself, whether it comes from impetuosity of character, which takes umbrage at the most venial occasions or has its

origin in suppressed spite, which insensibly kindles and which thinks in calm and reflective moments of the means of revenge. We obtain a good idea of the malice and deformity of anger and conceive a salutary horror for it when we look at the sources whence it proceeds. These sources are self-love, an inordinate attachment to earthly goods, and want of resignation to the will of God.

1. Unfortunately we are full of self-love, and wish to bear nothing that contradicts our inclinations or wounds our susceptibility. We would like to have always contentment and enjoyment—a desire, needless to say, too foolish to be realized. This is why the least opposition excites in us impatience and produces bitterness of spirit, selfishness, and spite. An egotistical love is the cause of these fretful motions, of that bilious disposition which becomes visible in certain circumstances and which destroys all peace of mind. The strong attachment which we have for the refinements of a sensual life gives rise to those bursts of violence which happen on the least provocation, at the smallest disappointment, or anything disagreeable, as for instance, on account of a dish badly prepared. If we did not have so much self-love, if we sought self-pleasure less, we would not give way so often to this passion. We are, however, so filled with pride of self that we want to be unduly honored and attended to, and to see our most extravagant whims and caprices satisfied, especially if we claim social preeminence or possess a goodly share of the world's goods. In our high position we exact of those below us the incense of flattery and are greatly incensed against those rash creatures who are too manly and

self-respecting to refuse us undeserved homage. We read in Scripture that Aman, inflated with pride on account of the favor bestowed on him by his king, was enraged against the Jew Mardocheus who refused to bend the knee, like others, before him. Aman, in his wrath, determined to put this presumptuous Jew and his whole race to death. But Aman's vengeance was turned on himself. It is on account of this hideous passion that people in humble life are exposed to the vengeance of the great and the rich. The latter visit the former with unjust punishment, if they find the former wanting in the least mark of respect they consider as their right. We would scarcely believe it, but strange as it may seem, even those in the lowest rank of society assume the same pretensions. They look for undue attention and find insult in a harmless word or in the least sign of what they deem to be contempt. What is still worse, they whose conduct deserves often the severest censure are irritated when corrected by those who have the right to do so. Good advice given with all desirable discretion causes them to break forth into the grossest language. If a parent, a wife or a pastor should use salutary words to point out shortcomings on the part of those they really love, that is enough to call forth the most violent abuse and to create the most vehement hatred. The cause of all this disorder is to be found in our overweening self-love and pride.

I appeal, Christians, to your own experience: why do you permit yourselves to be carried away by anger? If you will look back to its cause you will soon find that pride, self-love, rules you. You do not want to yield to anybody; you consider yourself the most

clever and able of men, and you wish that everybody should bend to you. Hence come these heated discussions with those who do not share your manner of looking at things; those recriminations and sarcasms you employ to silence your opponents or overthrow their arguments. You believe that your fortune, or your dignity, gives you the right to special consideration; you become incensed and bitter towards those who do not give you the homage you expect and demand. If somebody happen to say a wrong word, you perceive contempt or disrespect, and immediately you break into a terrible rage and cry out: *I do not intend to be insulted by people so far beneath me.* In a word, you want revenge at any cost. This is the regretful bitterness that comes from self-love.

Do not imagine that the fire of anger makes ravages on the souls of those only who are hasty of temper. No, it is a vice often concealed under the cloak of virtue and sanctity. With some it is like a flash of lightning that passes quickly; with others it is something more lasting, because it is suppressed and pondered. *It is a fire,* says St. Gregory, which is *slowly kindled.* It is a morose humor which is long fermenting, which shoots its hidden darts, and is more difficult to cure than boiling anger, because we find a thousand excuses and pleas for this insidious passion. Some call it zeal for the glory of God on whom reflects the insult they have received. We must needs punish a grave error, save a compromised reputation, and under these pretexts we cherish concealed revenge, secret hatred, which either prudence or fear admonishes us to stifle for a time, but which on occasion breaks forth, dealing out tremendous blows. Whence

comes this stubborn and hidden wrath, which we do not like to call passion? It has its source in self-love, which rules persons even given to piety.

2. This passion often comes from a too great attachment to earthly things. How often a loss, a damage, ill-success throw us into violent motions of anger! If we were less attached to earthly goods, a simple loss would not make us so downhearted; it would not inflame our wrath nor cause us to break into unseemly language. Probably we would not be so malicious as to plot the ruin of those who, we believe, have injured us. Can we really think that our cupidity finds compensation in such conduct as this? Are we not more culpable in God's sight, and do we not draw down on ourselves a greater misfortune than any temporal loss, the loss of our immortal souls? If the anger to which we give way could repair the damage that we have received, let us ask ourselves if we would be willing to purchase it at such a price? Are you not guilty of sin before God, when a mere trifle, a slight loss, an insignificant damage, caused by a child's petulance or a servant's carelessness, throws you into a towering rage? Does it not prove that your passion arises from no other source save your too strong attachment to worldly goods? From this same source come also those furious outbursts of unlucky gamblers, who, in their rage, break to pieces the instruments of their ruin, insult their lucky adversaries, blaspheme God's name, and as so often happens, commit suicide. How carefully would these poor wretches fly from the danger which besets their salvation if they knew better what it is to lose their souls?

3. Want of resignation to the will of God is another

cause of anger and impatience. *Man,* says Job, *is filled with miseries* (xiv, 1). Life abounds with trials which make it insupportable to those who appear to enjoy perfect happiness. God permits these trials to detach us from the world, to teach us that we have not here a lasting dwelling, but must seek a more permanent one and raise our desires to heaven. He tries our patience by misfortune, loss of property and sickness. Our submission to His will tends to procure His glory and renders us worthy of the promised reward (1 Pet., i, 7). How does the impatient and irascible man behave when the hand of God afflicts him? Instead of being submissive to the adorable will of the Creator he would make God lower Himself to his will. He does not want to suffer any opposition; he grows angry at it and murmurs against Providence. If sickness visits him, he becomes impatient, and vents his incessant complaints on all around him. In the economy of Providence, sickness should be profitable in many ways to him, but his whole desire is to recover his strength. The consolation that Religion bestows does not move nor touch him; he rages at those who would thus infuse some peace into his soul. Here is proof enough that this man is lacking in resignation to God's will. Another complains of the severity of the weather; he wants to regulate the temperature to suit his liking, and he accuses God of making the trouble manifest by inclement weather. Others complain of some misfortune: the desertion of a friend or a patron, the loss of a child, and in their obstinacy they refuse to see the dominant hand of God who sends these trials to exercise their virtue and to give them the opportunities for practising patience. They lack resignation to God's supreme will.

II.

Anger makes man the enemy of himself, of his fellowmen, and of God.

1. It makes man his own enemy, for it draws on him the greatest evils. Anger ruins health, shortens life and casts man into his grave before his time. *Envy and anger,* says the Wise man, *shorten a man's days.* (Eccli., xxx, 26). And these words have received the sanction of reason and experience.

The innate love of life and health should induce us to curb this passion, even if we did not have more important reasons for doing so, as for example the ravages which it makes in the heart ruled by it, for it troubles the mind and takes away peace and quiet from the soul without which there can be no true happiness on earth. What elevates man above other creatures is reason. Reason should regulate his actions and doings; it is the light which God has given to direct man's steps. There is nothing more opposed to reason than anger. When it once becomes mistress of man's heart, it puts him beside himself; it makes him the slave of passion which, instead of obeying reason, rules and subjugates it. The light of man's mind grows dim when once anger has entered it; he has no longer consciousness of his acts or words. St. John Chrysostom calls, for this reason, anger a kind of drunkenness, which takes away from man liberty of judgment. In Scripture anger is regarded as a species of folly that troubles the reason. *Anger,* says the Wise man, *resteth in the bosom of a fool.* **(Eccles. vii, 10.)**

To see the pertinency of this Scriptural remark, you need only glance at the actions and motions of a man in anger. Passion alone urges and incites him to speak or act; he trembles as if he were in the embrace of a fever; his face becomes alternately pale or flushed, his eyes flash, his look is full of menace, his movements full of fury, and as we gaze on him, we scarcely believe that we behold a man; he would be rather taken for a wild beast, a roaring lion, ready to tear in pieces anybody that crossed his path. He overthrows and breaks everything around him in his ungovernable anger; innocent as well as guilty are the victims of his fury; he maltreats without cause wife, children and servants; he goes so far as to vent his rage on insensible objects. There is no one so stupid as a man in anger; he asks and craves for the most absurd and impossible things. He expects that children with undeveloped reason and animals without reason should act as if they were endowed with intelligence. Insensible things ought to obey his caprices, and when they cannot manifest this impossible obedience, he throws them on the ground and crushes them. Is this using reason, that sublime gift of divine goodness? The peevishness of a child, the tardiness of a servant, a word escaped by chance, a piece of furniture out of place or some other trifle throws this man into such a choleric condition that nothing can quiet him. He rejects all apology, is irritated by everything said to him and listens to nothing but his blind passion. Is this following the promptings of reason? Oh! no; he says as much himself when the storm has passed. He then wishes to excuse himself by saying that he was carried away by anger, and that he did not know

what he said or did. This is an ignominious confession which only goes to prove that passion blinded his judgment and urged him to such acts as caused him to be ashamed afterwards. How can a man like this one have any peace of mind? Everything troubles and agitates him and he acquires an impatient habit of mind. Incessantly a prey to melancholy, he enjoys no rest. His heart is like a hell *where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth.* (Job x, 22.)

2. This wretched man, who is his own enemy, is also the enemy of his fellow-men. How can others endure him who is a burden to himself? Man was created a social being. Society is founded on concord and good understanding. This is impossible with him whom everything puts out of sorts and angers. We all have defects that wound our neighbor but for the sake of society and unity we must bear mutually with one another. A passionate man will endure nothing, nor bear with anybody. Offended, he becomes a volcano, belching forth black smoke that soon forms a fearful storm, and this storm breaks on those who are so bold as to wound his susceptibility. *Touch the mountains,* says the Royal prophet, *and they will smoke.* (Ps. cxliii, 5.) From this angry man rush forth torrents of blasphemy and curses on those who have offended him. Everybody finds something repulsive in him and keeps away from him for fear of irritating him. Children flee before him as from a dangerous beast, that is ever ready to tear any one to pieces. It is nigh impossible to live with a man addicted to anger, and we deem it more prudent to avoid him than to expose ourselves to his

fits of fury. Those who are compelled to live with him: his wife, children and servants, are never happy save in his absence, and they serve this pitiless master without affection and often without the least care.

Is not this vice the source of quarrels, law suits, domestic war, that desolate human society? This passion demands satisfaction for the slightest offense. There is no excess to which an exasperated man will not go to revenge himself on his opponents. He will not recoil at any calumny, any outrage or insult to besmirch their reputation; he will employ unmercifully legal means to crush them; often he lifts his hand to strike them and even to deprive them of life. *Their feet*, says the Psalmist, *are swift to shed blood.* (Ps. xiii, 3.) It is only the fear of human justice that prevents him from carrying into effect his homicidal fury. The number of this passion's victims is considerable. Abel fell under the hand of Cain armed with anger. The innocent children were sacrificed to the fury of a hated king, Herod. Anger excites murder, it produces all the horror of the battlefield. On account of anger the father curses his child; the master, his servants; the employer, his employees. Home life is destroyed by it, and discord is sowed in families once the most united. To sum up: the irascible man can live with nobody; his impetuous disposition estranges everybody from him. Disrespectful toward his superiors, arrogant towards his equals, he tyrannizes over his subordinates, draws on himself the hatred and contempt of all, and banishes himself from all decent society.

3. The angry man is an enemy of God, for nothing is more opposed to the spirit of God and Christian-

ity than the passion that rules him. This spirit of God is the spirit of peace. *God's place is in peace.* (Ps. lxxv, 3.) The Son of God came on earth as the Prince of peace to establish the Kingdom of peace. *Neither shall his voice,* says the Prophet, *be heard abroad. The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he will not quench.* (Is. xlii, 2, 3.) Jesus has taught us humility and meekness both by His word and example. He has assured us in the Gospel that the peacemakers shall be blessed. (Matt., v, 9.) He has commanded us to love our enemies, to forgive injuries, to render good for evil. Do we recognize the spirit of God, the spirit of Christianity, in him that can enjoy no repose of mind and body? The Lord does not acknowledge His image in the soul given to the transports of anger and revenge. That soul is rather the home of the devil, it has all his characteristics, for the rebellious spirit loves nothing more than discord and confusion. He takes great delight in disorder. St. Paul in recommending the faithful to shun this vice says: *Give not place to the devil.* (Eph. iv, 27), to make them understand that the devil rules where anger prevails. The soul that is inhabited by the infernal enemy can be no longer the dwelling-place of the Lord; He sees the rebellious angel there, the enemy of His glory. Jesus Christ does not acknowledge for His disciple the man marked with the sign of the beast, not possessing His spirit, which is the spirit of peace, patience, meekness and humility. Christianity obliges us to forgive our enemies. The passionate man thinks only of revenge. The spirit of Christ's religion inspires patience. The irritable man will endure nothing. Nothing is more opposed to the

spirit of God and Christianity than anger. Jesus has launched His anathemas against it. *Whosoever is angry with his brother,* He says, *shall be in danger of the judgment . . . and whosoever shall say: Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.* (Matt. v, 22.) These words prove superabundantly that anger makes man the enemy of God since Jesus pronounced against this vice such fearful threats, and they prove, besides, that man has no enemy more terrible, for neither man nor the devil can draw on himself more misery than by anger. Let us avoid this vice so odious in its causes and in itself, and so fatal in its effects. Listen to these beautiful words of St. Augustine: *Do you want to take revenge on an enemy, let this enemy be your own passion. Gather all your strength to conquer it, to repress its motions. You ought to fear it even when it appears to be righteous, to refuse it all place in your heart. This is much easier than to drive it out when once it has stolen in.*

If you have an irascible temper pray daily for grace to overcome it. Make a firm resolution not to be moved by anything that will happen. When the trial comes recollect your resolution. Think often that patience has made many saints; it will procure for you an immortal crown in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

SERMON VI.

GLUTTONY.

Let us walk . . . not in rioting and drunkenness. (Rom. xiii, 13.)

We all have a natural love for our bodies, and St. Paul says: *No man ever hated his own flesh.* (Eph. v, 29.) Our flesh is half of us, and it is contrary to our inclinations to harm or incommode it. But whatever love we have for our bodies, we must treat them differently from the way that nature teaches us. We should rather have a holy hatred for the body than an indulgent love. Our Lord tells us that if we would follow Him we must take up our cross, chastise our body and curb its evil propensities. There is very good reason for mortifying our bodily appetites. *The unruly love of the body,* says St. Bernard, *destroys the love of God.* Because of its sinful tendencies, the body must be governed as a rebellious servant. It is like a wild, stubborn horse, that will unseat and throw you if you do not keep a tight rein on it. The body is not only an enemy, but the worst of enemies, a domestic enemy, an interior traitor, that, on account of its thorough knowledge of our weaknesses, allows enemies from without to enter our souls. We cannot afford, if we value our salvation, to pamper the body, and satisfy its appetites, for there is nothing more contrary to spiritual progress, communication with

God or the spirit of prayer than sensual gratification. Therefore gluttony is numbered among the capital sins, because it hampers the soul in its pursuit of salvation. Let us consider:

I. What is Gluttony?

II. What are its effects and fatal consequences?

I.

Gluttony may be defined as an excessive love of eating and drinking. To eat and drink are both needful for the preservation of life. It is then only the inordinate love of eating and drinking that is forbidden as when we go to excess in things necessary for the support of life. There are three ways especially, according to St. Augustine, by which we exceed the bounds of temperance: in quantity, quality and manner of eating and drinking. We sin in quantity when we take more than the maintenence of bodily strength requires; in quality when we make use of forbidden food, or when we seek less our support of strength than a sensual gratification; in manner when we manifest greediness or desire food or drink outside of suitable times. St. Paul places gluttony *among the works of the flesh which exclude us from the Kingdom of heaven.* (Gal. v, 20.) This expression, however, refers to intemperance when it is a serious sin.

There is a happy medium which we can observe in this important matter. We must eat to repair and support the strength of our bodies that we may be able to attend to our duties and in this way glorify God. While the act of eating is natural, its end is spiritual, as St. Paul teaches us: *Whether you eat or*

drink, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. x, 31.) As the act proceeds from *concupiscible appetite,* it easily draws from it some of its dangerous qualities. There is gratification in it according to the wise provision of nature, and this pleasure will bear watching, lest it beget an inordinate love and desire, which is the cause of much sin. It is like a spark that may start a conflagration, and the only preventive is prudence, constant moderation. St. Augustine shows quite clearly the peril: *Whereas health is the end of eating and drinking, a dangerous pleasure joins itself as an attendant, and it generally seeks to go before and make me do that for its sake which I either say I do, or desire to do for health.* We must needs watch this appetite and confine it within due bounds, such as religion and virtue dictate.

The lives of the saints teach us that these holy servants of God were constantly on their guard against this insidious vice. They knew that it was the gate through which sin entered the world. The devil knew no more expedient means than gluttony joined with pride to rob our first parents of their innocence. Again, when he became jealous of the marvellous holiness of our Saviour's life, he endeavored to sully it by tempting our Lord, now exhausted after his long fast and hunger, to gluttony. The fathers of the desert never believed themselves too secure from this seductive vice, and consequently did their utmost to render their food insipid for fear that the devil might use their daily nourishment as an engine for their eternal damnation. Gluttony was the most difficult vice that St. Augustine, after his conversion, had to overcome, as he testifies: *In these temptations, I strove*

daily against the inordinate appetites of eating and drinking; and who is there, O Lord, that is not some little drawn beside the bounds of necessity? Whoever he is, he is a great man; let him magnify thy name. I am not such a one, because I am a sinful man.

As long as man followed the law of nature, even though he were bereft of the light of revelation, he was surrounded with all the temporal happiness that his state allowed. Temperance in eating and drinking was a notable natural virtue among the ancient peoples before luxury brought its attendant evils to poison national life. We admire the severe simplicity of the Lacedemonians in their diet, and Spartan fare does not mean delicacy or effeminacy. We find the same temperance obtaining among the ancient Persians and in the republics of Greece and Rome. The loss of worldwide sovereignty did not befall Rome until her people and rulers were enervated by excesses imported from the Orient. Her best days were when her rulers were men of simple habits and austere life. Far off in the East, Buddha, from whom has been called a vast heathen creed, thus speaks of moderate living: *Temperance is a tree which has for a root very little contentment, and for fruit calm and peace.* The philosopher Confucius counsels often the Chinese to be temperate in their habits. Mahomet expressly forbids his followers to taste wine. The Coreans speak sharply against immoderate drinking, as we see from their proverbs: *Heaven and earth are too small for a drunken man; White whiskey makes a red face,* and *There is no bottom to the appetite for drink.*

Christ has warned us against the abuse of our daily

bread by immoderate use of meat and drink, and He has given us the example of His own life as an encouragement to lead a temperate course of life. He certainly did not pamper His taste but rather suffered hunger and thirst, though He was Master of creation. We read in the Gospel that on one occasion when He was fatigued with His journey, He asked a Samaritan woman to give Him some of the water she had drawn from Jacob's well. Yet He seemed to have forgotten His request in His desire to instruct this woman and convert her from her evil ways. We are not told that He drank of the water. He lived in poverty from His childhood, and depended for His sustenance during His missionary life on what friends gave Him or what His Apostles secured by their labor. Do we not read of Him and His disciples plucking the ears of grain in the fields? He fasted much to give us an example. What was the drink offered to Him when in His agony on the cross? He cried out *I thirst!* It was a bitter mixture of vinegar and gall. His true disciples are known by their mortification. *They that are Christ's,* says St. Paul, *have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.* (Gal. v, 24.)

Christian temperance demands that we should not be too luxurious in our mode of living, for excessive eating and drinking bring many physical ills and unfit us for the proper conduct of life. *In many meats,* says the Wise man, *there will be sickness.* (Eccli. xxxvii, 33.) He speaks in another place of *sound and wholesome sleep with a moderate man.* (Ibid. xxxi, 24.) It is well, however, to remark that it is not how much we eat or drink that makes the sin of gluttony, but rather the affection for eating and drink-

ing. *The wise man,* says St. Augustine, *may use the most costly viands without any vice of gluttony or concupiscence, and the fool may be inflamed with the basest gluttony for the vilest food.* St. Gregory also observes: *Not the meat, but the appetite, is in fault.* We often take much dainty food without sin and yet fall into gluttony in the use of the meanest fare. Esau's greediness was for a mess of pottage. The Fathers remark that when the devil tempted our Lord, he did not offer Him delicacies, but merely bread. We are guilty of the sin of gluttony when sensuality causes us to violate important precepts, as for example, the precept of fasting, either by not fasting at all or making use of forbidden food. This is quite a common failing in our times when the law of the fast is practically ignored even by those who are not dispensed from it. We also commit this sin when we spend in dissipation and prodigality what is necessary for the support of our family, or when in our disordered method of living we scandalize our neighbor.

A terrible sin, and one most prevalent in our times and land, is the abuse of intoxicating drink, and nothing is more common in our day than to see men habitually deprived of the partial or total use of reason by undue indulgence in stimulants. What an injury to God! What shameful malice! What disorder, in the perversion of those things which God, in His wisdom, has destined for the preservation and support of the human body! Unhappily, even among Christians, there is scandalous excess, especially in the matter of drink. Men and even women live lives of misery and die deaths of stupor and madness from this cause. Drink is a fearful bondage that only the

miraculous grace of God can break. We refer not only to the gross reeling intoxication by which men shame themselves in our streets and public places, but also to drinking in social and private life where, covered over with the cloak of secrecy, both sexes cloud their understanding and undermine the moral power of their will by habitual use of liquor. It is a growing evil of our times, and it is making sad havoc of men, women, and even young children. We must be on our guard against all manner of intemperance. Vigilance is extremely necessary. *The life of man on earth,* says holy Job, and experience confirms his words, *is a warfare* (vii, 1). The flesh rebels, the world displays its seductions, the devil has set his snares everywhere, and we must be ever on the watch against so many enemies. *Our soul is weak and disarmed,* says St. Gregory, *as long as it has not triumphed over the interior enemy, intemperance, and has not entirely subjugated it.* The Church of Christ counts millions of saints in the glory of heaven; some have attained to happiness by the virtue of virginal purity; some by the palm of martyrdom; some by the practice of sublime virtues, but you will not find one, says St. Cyprian, *for whom temperance did not open the gates of eternal beatitude. Temperance,* says St. Athanasius, *drives away the demon, dissipates bad thoughts, clears the mind and purifies the heart.* Have we not need of all these benefits?

II.

The effects of gluttony are numerous, frightful and fatal. Gluttony obscures the mind, hardens the heart,

leads to the most shocking errors and winds up in impenitence. It ruins health, produces the most dangerous diseases and premature death. It allures man to dissipation and throws him into pitiable misery. It causes death of soul and body, destroys eternal and temporal goods, and robs man of grace, salvation, supernatural and natural gifts.

1. Gluttony darkens the understanding, hardens the heart, leads to frightful errors and finishes in impenitence. Examples, too numerous and sorrowful prove the truth of this observation. It goes back to the cradle of the human race. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and drew on themselves and their posterity the curse of heaven. Sin and death entered the world through gluttony. (Gen. iii.) This same vice drew Sodom and three other cities to excess and infamy, and God punished them by destroying them with avenging fire from heaven. (Gen. xix.) The Israelites in the desert were seduced to idolatry and incurred God's wrath. Their food was yet in their mouths when God's vengeance fell on them. (Ps. lxxvii, 30, 31.) It was in the midst of a banquet that Absalom killed his brother, and Herod gave orders to have the head of St. John the Baptist stricken off. (2 Kings xiii; Mark vi.) It was after a feast that Holofernes, stupid with eating and drinking, fell under the strokes of Judith. These are all terrible examples that prove to us the fatal consequences of this vice. It darkens the understanding and hardens the heart.

St. Paul gives us an argument which prevails over all others. He says that those who are addicted to intemperance are enemies of the cross of Christ; their

end is destruction and their God is their belly, to which they are slaves. (Philip. iii, 19.) What fearful expressions are these! Into what an abyss of wickedness and hardness of heart must a man have fallen to declare war on the Redeemer of the world, on Him who shed His precious blood for our salvation? to unloose his passions against the cross, the adorable instrument of redemption, the only hope of sinners? to renounce the Creator, the sovereign Being, the Master absolute, and bear his homage and worship to the feet of such a vile divinity? When they were given to this sin, says Isaiah, they left the Lord, they trampled under foot His commandments and became addicted to drunkenness. The prophet Osee hesitates not to say that wine and drunkenness take away the understanding, that is to say, render man like the stupid animal and cause him even to descend lower. (Osee iv, 11.)

Experience affords us instructive lessons. Of what are they not capable who are given to this degrading vice? Do we not see them, for the ignoble pleasure of eating and drinking, betraying their word of honor, their oaths, friends and kinsmen, and prepared to do anything? Are not lewdness, theft, quarreling, murder and blasphemy the shameful offspring of this vice? The miserable Baltassar is an example that ought to fill all souls with fear. Seated at the table with his courtiers, he ordered that the sacred vessels which his father had stolen from the temple of Jerusalem should be brought to the festive board; in his delirium, he, with his wives and concubines, profaned these consecrated vases; at the same time he saw a miraculous hand writing on the wall of the banquet hall his con-

demnation. Of how many blasphemies, license of language, impure conversation and obscene songs are not feasts and banquets the source? Ask your own conscience, and see if you have not been guilty of cynical raillery at virtue and religion in these gatherings, of scandal, by your talk and conduct, to your fellow-men? A man sodden with drink is the most despicable object in creation. Listen to St. Ambrose's description of him: *See,* says this Father, *the degrading role which the drunken man plays: he cries, blushes, weeps and laughs almost at the same moment; he no longer recognizes his friends, and makes use of a discourteous familiarity towards strangers: timid and bold at once. He gives and takes, boasts of being lord and master of all; he speaks and gives his opinion of everything in a blustering voice; he falls at length, and like an unclean animal, wallows in the mire. At other times if a person were to meet him, blood would be shed. The weakest man when he is drunk thinks he is the strongest of men, and the most ignorant believes he possesses extraordinary knowledge and cleverness. Look at his stupid appearance, the dull gleam of his eyes savage in their looks. Is there anything more disgusting than such a sight?*

2. Gluttony ruins health, produces most serious sickness and causes premature death. Scripture tells us: *Look not upon the wine when it is yellow, when the color thereof shineth in the glass; it goeth in pleasantly. But in the end it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk.* (Prov. xxiii, 31, 32.) What frightful diseases, what long attacks of sickness are not the fruits of intemperance? How many young men has it not hurried permaturely to the

grave, or at least wrecked their minds and bodies? The pagan Cicero told no lie when he said: *A sensual and intemperate youth hands over a wornout body to old age.* The pagan poet Seneca defines it as follows: *Drunkenness is nothing but voluntary madness,* and madness leads to an early grave. An old proverb runs: *Drunkenness has killed more men than the sword.* There can be no doubt that excess in eating and drinking weakens the body; it destroys the natural heat which supports life; the humors of the body gather and produce sickness which often leads to the tomb. How dearly we pay for such ignoble satisfaction? What pains, what long and stubborn suffering for the sensual gratification of a few moments! And how guilty are they who draw others to commit excess, especially in drinking. *Miserable men!* says St. Ambrose, *you invite your friends by the attraction of pleasure; you want their lives; you call them to the festive table and you hurry them to the grave; you promise them food, and you give them over to tortures; instead of wine, you pour out poison for them.*

3. Intemperance leads to dissipation and misery. How many families owe their ruin to it! This father bequeathed a considerable fortune to his children. The latter wanted nothing of the conveniences of life. In a brief time everything disappeared; all was swallowed in the gulf of dissipation. Good cheer, luxury and feasting absorbed the whole inheritance.

Look at the large number of laboring men who work incessantly and yet are always poor. When they fall ill, they are a prey to frightful misery, because, as St. Ambrose says: *A few hours spent in debauchery consume the fruit of the work of many days.* Wretched

men who sacrifice everything to the ignoble idol of intemperance, listen to the lesson which animals without reason give to you; look at the care which the tiger and the lion bestow on their young: they will deprive themselves of a portion of their prey to feed them, while you, inhuman men, will leave your families in most frightful destitution. They suffer while you gorge yourselves with food and drink. O merciless men, you deserve to die in the embrace of starvation and misery! Intemperance desolates homes and makes them living hells. From such homes come those malefactors that have been formed to crime in them: tramps, thieves, sluggards and the greatest criminals. Go into our prisons or visit our public hospitals; ask any one of the host of idle, good-for-nothing fellows that infest town and country what brought them to crime, sickness and penery, and if they are sincere, the answer will invariably be that if it were not sloth, it was drink.

Yet temporal punishment of this vice is nothing compared to the punishment which eternity reserves for the intemperate. The rich man asked nineteen hundred years ago for a drop of water to cool his thirst and it was refused him. We may be sure that he has not received it yet, for nothing changes in hell where there is *everlasting horror*. There sensuality will have in hunger and thirst the most cruel sufferings and in despair a terrible, eternal expiation.

Let us now learn to be temperate in our habits, in these Lenten days, when we do some penance for our sins and failings. If we make a firm resolution and pray God to strengthen us, we shall soon conquer this disgusting vice and be happy here and hereafter.

SERMON VII.

ENVY.

Envy is the rottenness of the bones. Prov. xiv, 30.

Charity is the principal law that regulates Christian hearts. It should reign in the understanding and stifle all harmful thoughts of our neighbor; it should reign in the will and destroy all motions of envy. Envy is a vice diametrically opposed to charity, which urges us to desire and obtain good for our neighbor and to rejoice in his prosperity. Envy induces us not only to desire not to do good to our fellow-man, but also to be grieved and displeased at the good which he receives. It is a vice entirely Satanic in its nature, for as St. Basil and other Fathers teach, the demon envied in heaven the glory reserved to human nature by its hypostatic union with the Divine Word, and envied on earth Adam and his posterity the eternal happiness prepared for them. Therefore the demon tempted our first parents, and as the Wise man declares: *By the envy of the devil, death came into the world.* (Wisd. ii, 24.) Envy, says St. Augustine, excited Cain to kill Abel, the sons of Jacob to sell their brother Joseph, the Babylonians to expose Daniel to the hungry lions, and the Jews to crucify our Lord. It is a vile and abject vice that dwells only in base souls. The envious man, says St. Basil, tastes no joy; sadness never abandons him; it is his element. As rust consumes the iron

which produced it, as the worm gnaws the wool which engendered it, as the viper tears the entrails of its mother, so envy gnaws the heart of the envious man, dries his bones, and devours his whole substance.

Let us consider:

I. What is Envy?

II. What are the remedies for Envy?

I.

Envy is the sadness or displeasure which we feel at the prosperity of our neighbor, considering it as a diminution of our own happiness.

Envy has its own special qualities, and what often passes for envy is not always properly such, as virtue may be stigmatized under this odious name. We experience pain, because of the good our neighbor receives, but not always through the same motive. St. Thomas distinguishes four ways of feeling pain at the good of our neighbor. First, when the cause of our pain comes from the fear that our neighbor's good will be a source of misfortune to others or ourselves. St. Gregory says that we rejoice at an enemy's misfortune without wounding charity or feeling envy. When we see, for example, that an enemy's fall would be attended by relief to many who are in misery, we are saddened at his prosperity. He has built his success on the ruins of others' possessions. Secondly, we are afflicted at the good of our neighbor, not because he possesses it, but because we have need of it and are deprived of it. This is not envy; the philosopher Aristotle calls it zeal, emulation. Here again we make the distinction: when we are afflicted on account of

spiritual and eternal goods, our affliction is praiseworthy and virtuous; when it refers to temporal goods, it is good or bad, according to the intention and moderation with which it is felt. Thirdly, we grieve to see good happening to a man who is unworthy of it. Here we must recognize the wonderful ways of Providence which disposes riches and poverty, glory and infamy according to its own wise designs. Scripture forbids us to entertain such sadness. The Royal Prophet says: *My steps had well nigh slipped, because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.* (Ps. lxxii, 2, 3.) Again, he says: *Be not emulous of evil doers, nor envy them that work iniquity.* (Ps. xxxvi, 1.) Let us accept the unsearchable ways of Divine Providence. Fourthly, we are afflicted at the good of our neighbor because it prevents or lessens our own; this sadness is properly the vice of envy.

Envy is a feeling of sadness and trouble at the prosperity of our neighbor, a regretful reflection on the means by which he may have obtained a certain position, certain advantages, and the esteem which is generally accorded him. Envy represents him as not deserving what he enjoys, makes us feel humiliated at seeing him our equal or superior, and hurt at perceiving that the position or honor which is his has escaped us; we foster secretly the fond wish that this man's mediocrity will soon be recognized and that he will have to descend again to his former condition, thereby leaving to us a free and open opportunity to rise above him. It is easy to see what malice is seated in the heart of an envious man. He ceases to be a man, to belong to human society. He stifles the inborn sentiment of

brotherly love, the tenderest motions of nature, which share willingly the good or bad fortune of the neighbor. He sees nobody but himself, lives for nobody but himself. His neighbor's joy tears asunder his heart-chords, and his neighbor's misfortune causes him to leap with gladness. Like Satan, he sneers when he sees tears shed. Envy may not always rise to this degree of perversity, but it is the same vice that may ascend continually and reach eventually a very high stage of malice. It is such a despicable vice that nobody wants to be accused of possessing it. The greatest criminal will confess to everything but envy. He will not blush to say that he has been irascible, intemperate, and even lewd, but he will never admit that he has been envious. All are ashamed to be taxed with envy and warmly defend themselves against the charge. No decent man wants to be classed among those whom the sight of a neighbor's happiness embitters, who laugh at the tears of misery and weep at others' gladness. This is an irrefragable proof that nature recoils before envy, as before a monster, which humanity has smitten with universal reprobation.

Despite the general aversion which envy inspires, it is a most common vice. It permeates all professions, conditions and ages of life. There is hardly a passion that exercises such extensive rule. It is recognizable in the jealous looks of the child that ceases to prattle; and it makes the worn-out old man gnash his few teeth. Governments are envious of one another's territories, and the beggar envies the generous alms of his fellow-mendicant. Even those who pass for virtuous Christians, who lead holy, retired lives, are not always exempt from this vice. They think that the sentiment

of justice prompts them to blame others, when it is envy that inspires their censure. Envy mixes its poison with zeal, and both declare war on abuses. They appear to combat crime, but they only add to its malice. We may justly ask ourselves: Are we not more or less tainted with the venom of envy? Let us question our conscience.

A friend in conversation happens to draw an agreeable picture of an acquaintance; he dilates on the latter's gifts and advantages, such, as we think, we possess and regard as means to rise in the world above our fellow-men. The brilliance of the man's worth dazzles our eyes and his praise sounds very discordantly in our ears. We cannot restrain our tongue, and we raise doubts about his excellences; we find fault with this much belauded man and shrug our shoulders; contradictions multiply. Our looks, our whole countenance, assume a darkened aspect; our uneasiness is quite apparent. We need have no doubt; these are marked symptoms of envy; for he that feels wounded by praise bestowed on another is wanting in love.

You see a man honored with the esteem of his neighbors and acquaintances: all show him signs of respect and hang on his words; they seek his counsel in difficult matters. If you are uneasy at this show of honor and respect, you may be assured that your heart is infected by the vice of envy.

You avoid all contact with certain individuals; you remain away from the social circle in which they move; you do not want to appear with those whose superior qualities outshine your own, whose wit is livelier, whose taste is more refined and manners more elegant. What is the reason of your behavior? Envy has made you a discontented, sour and unsociable man.

You break into vituperative language, calumny and detraction, against those who seem to stand in your light or whose merit counterbalances your own. You endeavor to block their undertakings and to stem the tide of success. Your envy has turned to hatred, and you have become a persecutor.

some particular charm, advantage or pleasure apparently associated with it. The thief has in his possession what he stole; the debauchee has his wicked enjoyment; the miser gloats over his treasures; the blasphemer satisfies his impious rage in words, and the revengeful man takes delight in inflicting vengeance. But what advantage has envy? What pleasure does it

What profit has a man in envy? Every other sin has bring? It only poisons the life of the man who is its victim. The envious man is his own enemy, and he neither enjoys, nor can he enjoy repose. His sad, somber face, his beclouded look and sunken eyes, his hollow cheeks, all betray the serpent that is gnawing at his heart.

How can he be contented who has no peace with God, his fellow-man, or himself? The envious soul has no peace with God. It is God who disposes human destiny, for all things belong to Him. All earthly goods are in His hands, and He bestows them as He wills. As the waters flow into the sea, so do the treasures of the earth flow into the hands of those whom God chooses. It is not chance, but God's will that makes men rich and poor. In the same manner God opens the way for His creatures to honor and dignity. He gives the men of His choice talent and ability. He places these gifted men in positions in which they may exercise successfully their talents. God also bestows

on His creatures beauty of soul and body. Everything is designed according to His wisdom.

Now, on whom falls the bitterness of envy, if not on God? The envious man attacks God's wisdom and prudence. When he envies the rich man, he rebels against the divine dispensation; when he envies the man who occupies a higher position in the world, he combats God who placed that man in such a station; when he endeavors to retard his neighbor's prosperity, he is obstructing God's way. When he envies the creature on whom God has bestowed beauty, is he not blaming God who has thus fashioned His creature? Envy draws on itself its own condemnation and punishment. The sons of the patriarch Jacob are a notable example of this. When Joseph, in the simplicity of his heart, narrated to his brothers the dream which foretokened his future dignity, they became jealous of the innocent youth. Envy urged them to take Joseph's life, but listening to reason, they concluded to sell him in bondage to some traveling merchants. A day came when Joseph's dream became a reality, and in time of famine, Jacob's sons were compelled to journey to Egypt where Joseph ruled to buy food for their necessity. They were forced to kneel before Joseph whom they had so cruelly wronged and feared for their lives. Joseph forgave them.

So it is generally with the envious. The day comes, when reduced to misery they are compelled to knock at the door of those whose success in life they vainly sought to thwart, and beg the bitter morsel that will keep life in them. The envious man has no place with others. What a happy world this is to the kind, benevolent man? What sources of enjoyment it affords

him? He finds men in it who are brothers; he finds the good, the beautiful and the useful. All this he appropriates to himself; he is interested in all this, and he partakes in this way of the happiness of mankind. He weeps with those who mourn, and his heart beats and swells with those who rejoice. He thanks Heaven when good triumphs over evil. He is a friend to rich as well as poor; he applauds talent and genius. On all sides he reaps an abundant harvest of pleasure. To him the human race is one vast family; all men are children of the same Father who lives in heaven, and this thought opens out his heart to his neighbor, making him look upon the latter's happiness as part and parcel of his own.

It is not thus with the envious man. Ruled by his despicable passion, he finds poison where others find the fountain of happiness. When he sees wealth, he is quick to say that fortune has come to wickedness. The sight of a man elevated in rank or position exasperates him, and he would be gratified to see the fortunate individual lowered to the dust. The news of a neighbor's success or of some good stroke of fortune unexpectedly acquired cuts him to the heart-core; health, beauty, talent, all grieve and disquiet him. Thus he drags his torment to the grave, enduring an anticipated hell, for who that is happy on earth does not find somebody happier than himself? The envious man wants to be the only happy one, and when he sees himself surpassed in merit, gifts and esteem, he is at war with his fellow-men and life becomes an insupportable burden to him.

The envious man has no peace with himself. Infatuated with his imaginary worth, how can he possess

peace? He refers everything desirable in the world exclusively to himself. There is no more degrading picture of egotism or selfishness than the envious man. He is thoroughly persuaded that wealth would be best placed in his hands; he has an unbounded ambition for honor, dignity, social rank and all human preference. In his eyes those who possess these advantages are unworthy of them; he alone would bear them gracefully and beneficially. These afflicting thoughts cause him ceaseless torture, and when night comes he dreams of what he is not, of what he ought to be, and tossing restlessly on his couch, he is indeed his own self-tormentor. How bitter must such a life be! When he adds to envy the desire of revenge, and goes so far as to wish the death of his neighbor or attempt his life, he does not excite our wonder. He is only doing what other envious men have done before him. Envy armed Cain's hand against his brother Abel; envy urged Saul to cast his lance at David; envy embittered the Pharisees against our Blessed Lord and gave them no rest until they nailed Him to the cross as an infamous impostor.

We ought to look into our souls and see if they are darkened by the destroying effects of this fearful passion. There are few exempt from its blighting ravages, and we ought to employ all means to divest ourselves of its presence and influence, for besides the misery which it produces in our lives here, it is the cause of reprobation in the never-ending ages hereafter.

II.

Envy, says Ovid, is a base vice which cannot raise itself to anything good. We may well follow the example of St. John the Baptist as a remedy against this un-Christian vice. When the Baptist's disciples sought to excite in him some motions of jealousy by telling him that all men were gathering about Jesus and deserting him, St. John replied tenderly: *My joy is therefore fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.* (John iii, 30.) We should be pleased when our neighbor possesses any good, for it is God's will that he should increase and I decrease. As true Christians, we should never envy our brother's glory, but rather procure it for him even at the cost of our own abasement. Charity which is opposed to envy gives us a share in all the goods of our fellow-men.

1. As a preservative against the vice of envy, let us consider that old truism: *Everything comes from God.* Man has nothing of himself, what he possesses comes from God's munificence. When we reflect on this axiom, we will not be envious and all envy or jealousy will be uprooted in the heart. Our neighbor is a rich man because God has made him such. God knows best how and to whom He distributes His gifts. How short-sighted I am when I presume to give advice to divine Wisdom! Do I know men better than God? Could I entrust to more worthy hands the favors which God has distributed?

2. God bestows His gifts according to the designs of His own paternal goodness. He knows well why He has refused you what He has given to others, why He has placed you in a humble condition and raised

others to opulence. Supposing this order were inverted, would you carry with moderation the burden of happiness? Would you make good use of it? Would you employ wealth for your own salvation and the common good? Do not be jealous; be rather resigned to your lot. Riches might make you proud and lead you to a sinful life. You are sickly, delicate, and you suffer continually. Do not envy others their health. Who knows but that good health might throw you into all the dangers of a stormy life? Ill health is a salutary restraint on you, and keeps you in the way of virtue. Health and vigor might do otherwise.

3. The Christian's first duty is charity. According to St. Paul, *Charity envieth not.* (1 Cor. xiii, 4.) It has a tender regard for the neighbor's necessities; it is moved at the sight of his afflictions and mingles its tears with his. It shares the good and bad fortune of all, and rejoices in the happiness of all. These are the unmistakable traits of charity. Envy would efface them and leave no trace of them. A man ceases to be a Christian when he envies his brother's joy or prosperity; he is no longer worthy to be called a son of the heavenly Father, a member of Jesus Christ who was the Victim of charity, or a brother of men whose well-being afflicts him.

4. Christianity teaches us to aspire to the goods of a higher order. Why should we be concerned about the obscure condition in which we live, the silence which covers our actions, or the absence of praise? Is not peace of mind more valuable than honor and glory? The consciousness of virtue ought to be sufficient for us. What matters it if wrinkles furrow my face and the bright color of youth has left my cheeks? True

beauty is virtue. To it I should aspire and become more like God, Eternal Beauty. What is wealth to me? What is poverty? Resignation, patience, constancy in well-doing—these are more precious than gold and silver. I must endeavor to acquire them.

5. It is a terrifying thought that the envious cannot hope for the happiness of heaven. St. Paul places (Gal. iii, 21.) envy among the works of the flesh that exclude men from the kingdom of heaven. For envy would change heaven into a frightful hell. An envious man in heaven would be unhappy at the sight of a degree of glory superior to his own; he would be jealous of the soul that was rewarded for virtue greater than his own. No, that despicable vice cannot enter there where reign repose and peace; where every spirit rejoices in the happiness and glory of one another; where the purest and holiest love unite one to the other. That vice cannot enter that blessed land—that vice which is the enemy of peace, the destroyer of contentment, love and felicity. Hell gave birth to envy, and in hell it will receive the chastisement it deserves.

When we reflect on these clear and salutary truths, we shall find an efficacious remedy against envy. If it should still abide with us, let us then have recourse to prayer which nothing can resist. Let us ask God to infuse His good spirit into our hearts and destroy in us all hateful thought. God is love, and He will enkindle in us the flame of charity. And while we are charitable towards all men, we need not fear envy manifested towards ourselves. Dogs bark at the moon, but that does not prevent that orb from pursuing its beneficent course in space. When the dogs become tired, the discordant sounds cease. So it is with envy.

SERMON VIII.

SLOTH.

Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways, and learn wisdom. (Prov. vi, 6.)

The law of labor is universal, and it embraces an obligation which we owe to God, to ourselves and to society. It has been enjoined on man as a duty of the state of creation and as a portion of the condemnation of sin. Even when Adam abode in the state of innocence, he was commanded by God to do some labor: *The Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it.* (Gen. ii, 15.) While Adam united with the angels in praising God, he was ordered also to cultivate the delightful garden that was his home. His labor, however, was a pleasure. The earth yielded generously its fruits and flowers, and Adam found supreme satisfaction in attending to nature's products. We must admire God's wisdom in appointing the two-fold task to the first man; first, of praising with the angels His infinite goodness, thereby using profitably the faculties of the human soul, and, secondly, of exercising the members of the body by diligent, but pleasing labor.

When Adam fell the pleasurable duty of labor was changed into a painful chastisement. Labor is now the wages of sin as much as death is. God cursed the earth

in Adam's work, and passed his sentence upon him: *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken.* (Gen. iii, 19.) Because sin is common to all, its punishments are likewise common. Labor—a punishment of sin—is common to all of Adam's children, *from him that sitteth on a throne of glory unto him that is humbled in earth and ashes.* (Eccles. xl, 3.)

The slothful man, who refuses to work, rebels against divine authority, and is as guilty in God's sight as the first creature who said: *I will not serve.* Sloth is then a grevious sin.

Let us consider:

I. What is Sloth?

II. What are its Remedies?

I.

Sloth is a voluntary languor or disgust for the things of God and salvation. Cassian defines it as a *laziness of mind in performing anything that is good, and, particularly, a loathing and distaste for spiritual things.*

We have used the words *voluntary languor or disgust* advisedly to prevent misconception. When we experience the effects of our natural frailty and the fighting of the flesh against the spirit, or encounter with disappointment the difficulties that are inseparable from the service of God, we sometimes feel this langor, weariness and disgust, but as long as we do not give in to this feeling and contend against it, endeavoring to do our duty, it is only a temptation to sloth from which nobody is free, and not the deadly sin itself which, like all sin, rests in the free consent of the will. The reason why this voluntary disgust for spiritual things is

a capital sin is because it is the cause of many other serious sins, and contains very great malice, that produces most fatal consequences.

The spiritual apathy that is the result of slothfulness is a condition of soul odious to God, because it is opposed to charity, the first and most important of all divine precepts. St. Paul calls that weariness which prevents us from beginning and finishing the work of salvation *the sorrow of the world,* and he adds that it *worketh death.* (2 Cor. vii, 10.) Now this sorrow is nought else than the disgust which worldlings feel when they abandon the service of God for that of the world. We read in the Apocalypse that St. John was commanded by the Lord to write different messages to the Churches of the East, and among them was one which reveals the mind of the Lord regarding indifference and sloth. To the Angel or Bishop of the Church of Laodicea, the Beloved Disciple was to write this severe reproof: *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.* (Apoc. iii, 15, 16.) The sense of these words is: *If you did not know the meaning of the Law, you would not have been charged with such grave responsibility, but now that you know My will and commandments and have not the zeal of charity, I will reject you because of your sloth,* or as some commentators say, *May I find you henceforth burning with pure zeal and bathed in the tears of true repentance!* This would seem to mean that if the Bishop of Laodicea did not bestir himself in the work of saving souls and was not sorry for his sloth and indifference, he would suffer reprobation at the hands of God.

We cannot help being moved by the condemnation of the slothful and unprofitable servant, who hid his master's talent in the ground, when, like the other wise servants, he might have made his trust useful and profitable for his lord. On his return from a far country, the master seeing the apathy of his negligent servant, called him a *wicked and slothful servant,* and ordered him to be cast into outer darkness where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (Matt. xxv, 26, 30.) Slothful souls are like the fig-tree mentioned in the Gospel. For three years the owner of the vineyard came seeking fruit on the tree and found none, and ordered it to be cut down, for it only cumbered the ground. Even so the Lord will reject the slothful who do nothing good, because they are an eyesore, a scandal to all worthy souls. We draw from these symbolic punishments an idea of how malicious and hateful to God is the sin of sloth.

Sloth is productive of the worst results; it destroys all the virtues, uprooting its seeds in the soul. St. Bonaventure likens sloth to a slow hectic fever that unseen in its ravages drains the body, leaving it without strength. Physicians tell us that diseases that proceed from decay are of all others most dangerous and not responsive even to the best treatment. It is much the same with spiritual diseases: they make the soul soft and weak, and sap its strength and courage. Without vigor and zeal the soul becomes incapable of exerting itself or practising virtue. Men given to slothfulness are apparently unconscious of the terrible effects which their predominant sin is working within them. If you were to chide them for their spiritual inactivity, you would receive this or some similar reply: *I do*

nothing wrong. I do not swear, steal, nor harm anybody. The intrinsic malice of sloth is seen, not as in other sins, in audacious acts of evil, but rather in omissions of duty which make the sin all the more dangerous. Other sins flame up like fire and are quite visible, but the influence of sloth is hidden and enkindles the passions unperceived until it is too late to quench the fire that has been working secretly in the soul. The monks of the Thebaid, as Cassian tells us, feared indolence exceedingly. It was a maxim with them that he who worked had only one devil to fight against, but the slothful monk had to contend with innumerable unclean spirits. Many of the fathers have called sloth *the mother of all vices,* and hence it is one of the rules of spiritual life: *Be always doing something, that the devil may always find you busy.* The ancient Egyptian anchorets valued labor highly as a principal duty of their penitential lives, *not* as St. Jerome tells us, *on account of necessity of the body, but on account of salvation of the soul.*

Sloth renders us an object of derision to others. A lazy, indolent man brings on himself the just correction of his superiors and the frequent contempt of his inferiors, who make no effort to conceal their opinion of him. What is worse, he is the laughing-stock of the devil himself, who makes sport of him, using at will his satanic power to rule sense, imagination and faculty. So fearful is the devil's influence over a slothful soul, that it throws the soul into a torpor and inertness like a mass of lead, that is only inferior to diabolical possession. Attached to his vice, the sluggard yields absolutely to sensual enjoyment. He cannot look upwards, for his thoughts grovel on the earth,

and his soul, like his body, loses all taste for the spiritual things. This wretched state soon becomes a second nature, dishonorable in the minds of all virtuous men. It is no wonder that the slothful man forfeits the esteem of all good men and earns the contempt of the community.

Sloth makes us the object of our own shame. Every sluggard must feel that in becoming the slave of his slothfulness, he has abdicated all his manly attributes and is just on the level with the brute creation. The beast of the field follows its instinct, but the slothful man abdicates reason and gives himself over to a most degrading submission to the sensuality predominating in him—a disorderly condition worse than the material instinctiveness of the beast. The sluggard has reason to be ashamed of himself, for he gives no practical, tangible evidence of either manhood or Christianity.

Sloth is very fatal because it is the offspring of habit. We often hear of that mortal chill which comes on travelers in the Arctic regions before they are aware of it. We are told that this chill creeps on its victim with a pleasing, agreeable sensation and works death before he is conscious of what has happened. Spiritual sloth has much the same traits. A man will commence with backsliding; he neglects small duties; he grows slack in his spiritual life. Gradually, he becomes bolder and more careless, and he is untroubled in conscience when he has neglected great duties, first some, and again others, till all these omissions have become a chain of habit. All these actions are acts of his free will, as much as his act of speaking is. Because an act is an act of omission, it is none the less an act of the will. We have power of will, and it is an act of that

faculty when we refuse to use that power. Men begin with neglecting their prayers, going to confession and communion, omitting their self-examination, staying away from Mass, and they wind up with losing the sense of God's presence and His love. All these acts become a chain of habit, second nature, that must, unless a man overcome habit, end in eternal death. The slothful man is bound by what St. Peter calls *ropes of darkness*, and he ought to tremble at the impending judgment of God. And he does tremble, but it is with that diabolical fear that produces despair, when hope is lost and men crazed by sin *gnaw their tongues for pain.* (Apoc. xvi, 10.)

We have examples enough in Scripture of the evil effects of sloth. How conducive to vice is idleness! Adam was commanded by God to work in Paradise, but he became negligent and sinned. As long as the Israelites labored in Egypt, they did no evil, but when, as Scripture tells us, they began to eat and drink and rose up to play (Exod. xxxii, 6.), they fell into idolatry. Sampson passed many days in idleness and folly with Delila, and, as a consequence, lost his strength, his liberty and his life. (Judg. ch. xvi. 2 Kings ch. xi) Jonas slept soundly when everybody else was striving to save the ship in a storm, and he was cast by the enraged seamen into the deep. While Solomon was engaged in building the Temple he led a virtuous life, but when he had finished his great labor, he began to lead an idle life and soon fell victim to an unholy love for strange women and to idolatry. It was the same with his father David, who sent his generals to fight Israel's battles, while he remained slothfully at home. As a result, David fell into grevious sins. The prophet

Ezekiel tells us that of the four unhappy causes through which Sodom fell into crime, sloth was one of the principal. Sloth opens the door to all sorts of evil and shuts it to all manner of goodness. Labor is necessary to obtain good, and there is nothing that the sluggard detests more than labor. Yet holy Job tells us *man is born to labor and the bird to fly.* (v, 7.) If we are addicted to this base and unmanly vice, let us arouse ourselves to the performance of our duties.

Sloth is so dangerous that we ought to fear even the least tendency towards it. We see this danger when we think on the meaning of our Saviour's words: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire.* (Matt. vii, 19.) Again, He warns us to live with great care and diligence, a virtue directly opposed to sloth: *Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is.* (Mark xiii, 33.)

The first remedy for sloth is the consideration of the arduous life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. We see what hardship and toil He underwent from the beginning of His life till the end. He rested not during the day, because he went around doing good: curing the sick, the lame and the blind and instructing the people; He took but little repose at night, for in those quiet hours he prayed continually to the Almighty Father. Everything that He did was referable to our salvation. For us He bore the heavy cross up the drear slope of Calvary; for us He died on it in unspeakable suffering. If our Blessed Lord took so much pains to obtain our salvation, are we not bound in all justice to work for the same end? The august Lamb suffered untold torture to free us from our sins, and will we not take the

trouble to divest our souls from the guilt of them? Let us consider also the constant labors of the Apostles, the sufferings of the martyrs, the perseverance of the confessors, virgins and holy widows, and their example will stir us to do something for the salvation of our souls.

Another remedy for sloth is the consideration of nature's activity. Nothing is idle in nature. Just as the angels and saints in heaven are continually praising God, so in physical nature the sun, the moon and the stars are in a perpetual round of labor to serve mankind. Plant and tree are ever growing, producing fruit and flower. The ant is busy all summer and autumn hoarding up its winter-store; the bee is as busy making its honey-comb from which the drones will be driven. All creatures labor in their own way to work out the end of their creation. How can man—a rational creature—give himself to the vice of sloth that is abhorred instinctively by even the irrational creatures! We see around us business men of all kinds using every effort to gather the perishable riches of the world, men amassing gigantic fortunes and statesmen devising ways and means to acquire new territories for their respective governments. Will we sit down and be idle when we may lay up treasures in heaven, riches that the thief cannot steal and that will endure forever? We possess *now* strength of mind and body. The time will come when we shall have neither. Life is at best a short span. How foolish we are not to grasp our present opportunities and to work out our salvation! *The night cometh when no man can work.* (John ix, 5.) Another salutary reflection that will help us overcome slothfulness is that our lives must be lives of

penance on account of the number and grievousness of our sins. We need a large amount of contrition, fervor and devotion to obtain forgiveness and grace to do well. How much we admire the example of St. Peter who denied his Lord and Master three several times, yet wept for his sin his whole lifetime though he had been forgiven! Does not the example of the Magdalen impress us greatly, when we see her in the mountain-cave bewailing till the end of her life the sins which she had committed before her conversion, though she had heard the merciful words of the Saviour: *Thy sins are forgiven thee?* Many saints led lives of the austerest penance though they had not committed a tithe of the sins that have sullied our souls. Why should we not rise from our torpor and during this life—the time of God's grace and mercy—bring forth fruits worthy of penance? Why should we not labor to forestall the judgment of the next world by judging ourselves severely in this world? We have an all-important work to do here, if we value the happiness of the life to come. Let us make good use of the time God has given to save our souls, and consider every day lost that has no spiritual fruit.

Lastly, when we are tempted to spiritual sloth, we must have recourse to prayer. Prayer is always a necessary work in our difficulties and temptations. We cannot be in a more wretched condition than were the publican and the prodigal, yet they succeeded in obtaining God's favor through prayer. The prophet Osee places prayer as a sovereign remedy for all our evils: *Take with you words, and return to the Lord, and say to Him: take away all iniquity, and receive the good and we will render the calves of our lips.* (Osee xiv,

3.) So we see God in prayer, and He graciously hears us. Let us not be faint-hearted, but speak to God confidently. If charity, as St. Thomas says, makes prayer meritorious, hope makes it efficacious. *Hope alone finds favor before Thy Majesty,* exclaims St. Bernard, *and Thou dost place the oil of Thy mercy only in the vessel of confidence.*

Again I repeat the necessity of perseverance in our prayer. *We must always pray and not faint,* says the Scripture, if we desire to obtain what we ask. Constancy gains everything. The widow in the parable overcame, by her importunity, the obstinacy of the unjust judge, who feared neither God nor man and eventually obtained of him all that she desired. *For if He seems afar off,* says the prophet, *He will appear in the end, and will not lie; if He makes any delay, wait for Him; for coming He will come, and will not be slack.* (Hab. v, 3.) He will fill you with joy and you will rejoice *as a giant to run the way.* (Ps. xviii, 6.)

In conclusion, let us advise you not to be content with merely resisting temptations to these seven deadly sins, but to draw from these temptations incentives to the practice of the virtues opposed to these sins. In following such a course you will, by your own diligence and God's grace, be no worse, but better for having been tempted, and you will gather for yourself great spiritual benefit and advantage. If you should be tempted to pride, rejoice in whatever humiliation you may receive. If covetousness assail you, be charitable to the poor. If you are drawn into the toils of impurity and gluttony, lessen somewhat the good cheer to which you have been accustomed and restrain your appetite.

If anger and envy sadden your life, follow St. Paul's rule: *With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity.* (Eph. iv, 2.) But let your chief business be to avoid idleness, the mother of vice, but be ever employed in something to your advantage. *It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we believed.* (Rom. xiii, 11.)

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